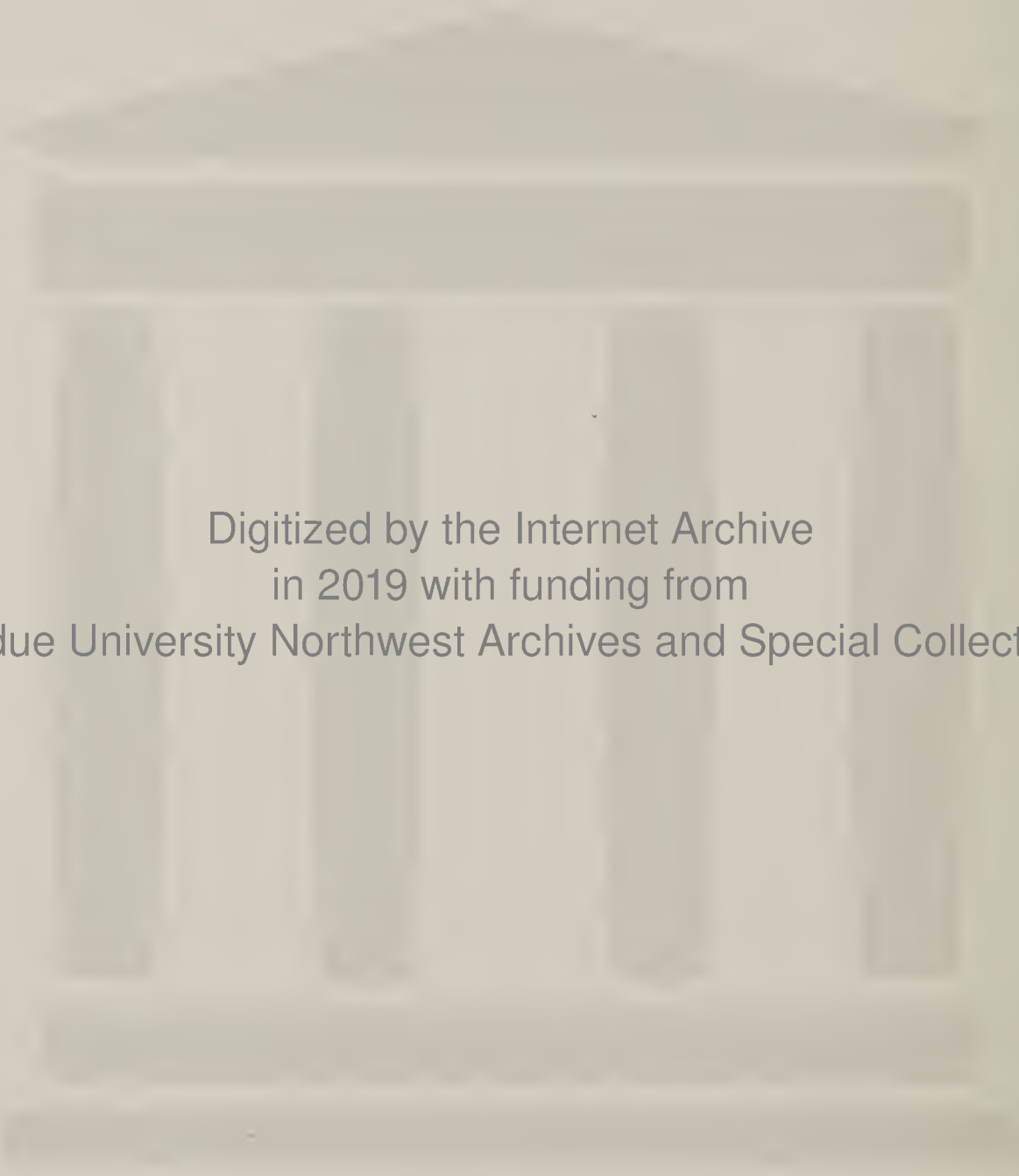


Portals

The
Literary
Journal of
Purdue
University
North
Central





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The Literary Journal
of
Purdue University North Central



1997

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Foreword

Robert Frost once remarked that poetry is a way of taking life by the throat. In his poem on his daughter's activities as a writer, the poet Richard Wilber writes, "Young as she is, the stuff/Of her life is a great cargo." These two notions seem to depict what is found in the pages of this 1997 issue of *Portals*. For here we see young writers, students at the North Central campus of Purdue University, dealing honestly and deeply with the problems of their lives. From Brenda Likavec's "Out Cold," a frank portrayal of domestic abuse, to Jodi Sobecki's "The Nun from Hell," a lighthearted look at early education, these essays, stories, and poems present a wide range of human experience. The editors are grateful to Chancellor Dale Alspaugh for his generous and continued support, Joy Banyas and Karen Prescott of the Publications Office, Eileen Nelson and Jean-Ann Morton of Letters and Languages, and *The Spectator*. We thank the writers and photographers who have contributed to this endeavor. Their generosity is unmatched; their willingness to take life by the throat and to share the experience remain the central concern of *Portals*.

Dr. Vernon P. Loggins

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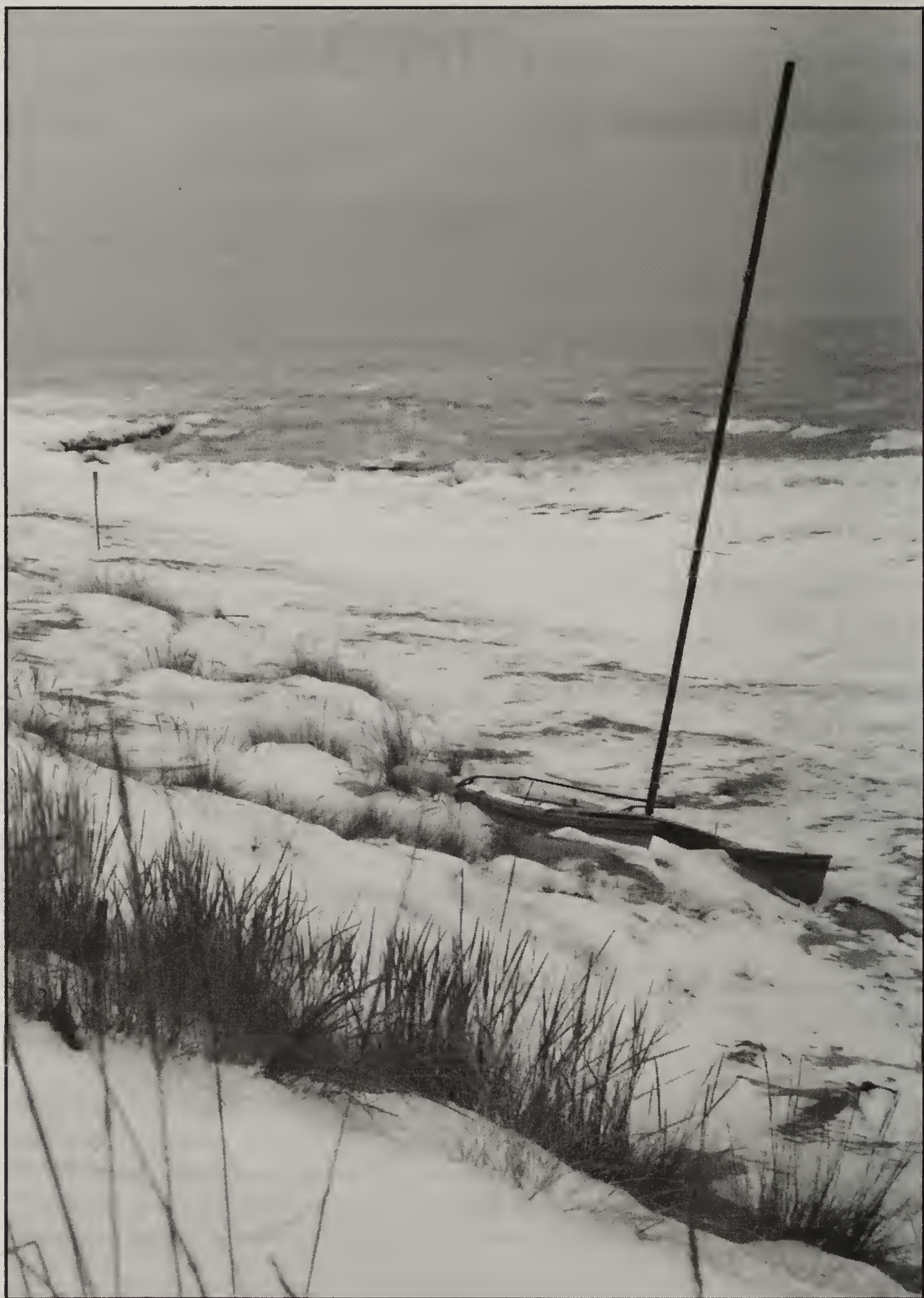
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Nancy Howell

Fiction

Brenda Likavec

Nancy Howell

Julie Hodges

Robert Cox

James R. Norris



Sharon White

Brenda Likavec

Out Cold

The cool tile hit her face like a bucket of water as she fell to the floor. In a heap, sobbing, she tried to pull herself to her feet. She grabbed the porcelain toilet at its side and struggled to an upright position. Barely upright, she began heaving again, vomit splattering on the toilet, the floor, and herself. She moaned from the acid burns in her throat and the queasiness in her guts. Breathing rapidly, she tried to calm herself, not wanting to throw up the rest of the contents of her stomach. Resting on her knees, she finally gained a little of her senses.

“Well, Josephine,” she thought out loud, “you’ve really done it this time.”

The door violently swung open and a short man with frizzy hair streaked in, frantically looking about.

“Jesus Fucking Christ, Joey. Are you ever going to get a grip on yourself? I’m getting just a little bit sick of your heaving and weaving every weekend. If you can’t handle it, either stop it or go somewhere else,” Gene said in his most authoritative voice, which unfortunately most resembled Alvin Chipmunk.

“Shut your hole, Gene,” Joey croaked. “You just have no idea. Not a clue. Do you think I like doing this to myself? Jesus, I wish I were dead.”

“Can the melodrama, Joey. What is going on with you? I remember not three months ago you were clean and sober and would not touch even a fucking wine cooler, but now you’re a slobbering lush. What happened? You can’t just shut me out of this, doll. You’re going to kill yourself,” Gene squeaked.

Gene knelt on the floor next to Joey and helped her sit upright. She began sobbing heavily but calmed as Gene pulled her tight and she began to tell her story.

“Okay, you know that I got thrown out of my mom’s place, like three years ago, right? Well, she calls me about a month ago and asks me to come over for a visit or some shit like that. I figure that she’s just going to ask me to come back home or to borrow some money like usual. Well, boy oh boy was I wrong about this one,” she began as she wiped her nose on her sweater sleeve. “So, I go down there and it’s like an ambush or something. There’s my mom, my brother, my grandparents, and my uncle, who you know is the God guy.”

“The drunk priest?” Gene interjected.

“Yeah, that’s the one,” Joey continued. “Well, I knew something was up and that I wasn’t going to be amused by this little meeting, so I was blunt and asked what was going on.” She lit a cigarette and Gene did the same. She paused for several moments, reveling in the nicotine.

“Nobody said a word for like three minutes and they all kept looking at me as if I were the antichrist or Jesse Helms or something. I was just about to walk out when I heard my mother say ‘Wait!’. I turned around and she started talking. She starts talking to me about how I was living a life of sin and how I was probably going to Hell for all of the bad things that I had done, and that I knew what she was talking about.”

Gene said, “She can’t know about that. Only four people in the world know about that. Me, you, that son of a bitch, and the doctor. Is that what she was talking about?”

“Well, I wasn’t sure, but I needed to test it out, you know? So I, idiot that I am, said, ‘Just what have I done that is so goddamned bad?’ And they all began to list off things that I had done. The little excursion to New York when I was 14, the time I disappeared for three days to come see you guys up here, the time I got my brother arrested for selling pot, the time I kicked my dad in the balls for trying to hit me, the time I told my mom to check herself into a loony bin after she told me she was going to fucking kill herself.”

“Wait a minute,” Gene interjected, “all of those things aren’t so bad. That was just you being young and some of that shit was necessary. Do you know what I mean?”

“Exactly,” Joey continued. “That is why I was so fucking confused. I mean, I thought that they knew. Well, actually they did know about that whole thing and were holding that one out for last, because they had quite a bit more knowledge than even I did. You see, apparently that son of a bitch has found God.”

“No shit,” Gene said, taking a long drag on his Marlboro.

“No shit. Apparently, he called my mother and begged HER for HER forgiveness for getting her daughter pregnant, then beating her senseless. He wanted to know how his son or his daughter was and when he could see it. My mother, the psycho that she is, had no clue that I had even had sex much less been pregnant. Well, this was what got the ball rolling, this phone call. You see, then my mother finds it necessary to invite this fucker over for a talk. She also invites my uncle, the drunk priest, over to sit in on this little chat. Well, the son of a bitch told them everything: how I was a slut, wearing a tight dress one night and I was drunk and he had his way with me and how I wanted it but he was really sorry now.”

“I bet, “ Gene interjected.

“Well, he didn’t stop there. He then told them that he knocked me up that night and that when he found out he beat the shit out of me because he thought that his life was over. Well, Gene, he wanted to see his child. My mom was so confused because, you know, I don’t have any kids. They thanked that asshole, thanked him, for telling them about this and then after he left, they had some kind of family conference about me having an abortion. But Gene, it didn’t stop there. This gets even more bizarre. My brother is some kind of computer genius along with being a pot fiend and he somehow got my medical records. They know everything now, Gene. They know I had an abortion, they know I had the clap, and they know that I’m positive. I just wanted to be left alone, Gene. I just wanted to live out whatever life I have left without being harassed by my family. It would be different if they would be supportive or whatever but they are all so fucking wacky that I knew that it was impossible. I knew that if they found out that they would torment me for the rest of my days. Now, what the Hell am I supposed to do? They won’t leave me alone, and want me to come to church and they always leave messages on my machine telling me that they are praying for me to find my way to God when I just don’t think that there is anything for me to find.”

“Wait a minute,” Gene said. “How did you explain yourself to them? What did you say? I know you. You had to have reacted in some way to this attack.”

“I had no idea what to do. So I started laughing. They were shocked. All I could do was laugh and laugh as they watched me with their pious eyes. I just laughed my way out the door, back up here and then right into the bar. You see,

I hadn't been thinking about most of this stuff for like a year and then it all hits me at once. Plus I had to see my family, too. I don't know Gene. I just don't know."

"Joey, those assholes aren't worth dying over or even worrying about. What do you care what they think? What have they ever done for you, except annoy you? You can't drink yourself to death because you can't deal with a bunch of holier than thou twits who unfortunately share your DNA. That DNA shit doesn't mean a thing. Family isn't blood, Joey. Family is who takes care of you. That's me, Joey. You and I are family."

"Maybe you are right. I think I'll get my number changed and just try to forget about these people. I guess it's you and me, Gene. You'll take care of me?"

"Of course I will."

"Good, I think that I will need you to take care of my laundry," she said with a chuckle, looking down at her soiled sweater.

"Come on, girl. Let's get your drunk ass home," Gene said helping Joey to her feet. Walking toward the door, Joey lost her balance and taking Gene with her, she tumbled to the floor, out cold.

Nancy Howell

Summer's End

It's still early. Mom is in bed and I can hear snoring coming from the sunporch. I wish I could play there. My doll is out there with the new clothes Mom made for her. She used some material we found back of Hannigan's store. We don't get to town much and it's fun to look for things in those big cans.

Mom has an eye for finding things like that material, and for finding new friends. The nicest is sleeping out on the porch right now, so I don't want to wake him up. His name is Jack and I like him better than Cal. Cal always brought those tall brown bottles with him when he came to visit. He was nice, but the bottles smelled the next day. Mom seemed tired after he'd been here. Cal just dropped by after sunset, but Jack always stayed a couple of days to help us out. He used to sleep on a cot in the shed. Now he's out on the sunporch for awhile. I don't mind.

I love to be out there. Some of the windows have screens. When Mom lets me sleep out there, I can hear all the night sounds better than in my room. One morning I found a long green bug, with wings I could see through, hanging on the screen. I must have watched it a long time, 'cause I jumped when Mom said the chickens must be starved by now and we'd have no eggs and that bug had better be praying for rain or we'd have no corn at summer's end either.

Jack would come by every couple of weeks and he'd always bring me a rock. He worked a lot of farms and he said it was a privilege to have such a kinship with the earth. His favorite is called a geode. If you break it open, it looks like the cave I've seen over in Johnson County, all sparkly when they wave the lantern around inside. Jack said he had no money to buy toys, but that

time was more important than money and it took time to find a good rock. I already knew Jack didn't like money. Mom would try to hand some to him, but he'd shake his head, like he didn't want to touch it.

He told me fairies live in the geodes, and when their home breaks open to show their sparkling rooms, the fairies go out into the world granting wishes to deserving folks. I liked that idea and I used to keep a close eye on mine, just in case the fairies were looking for their old homes or deserving eight year olds. I wanted a red wagon. It was tiresome going down to the chicken house with those heavy wooden buckets. One was warped and some of the seed was lost along the way . . . not any more.

I'm glad we don't live in town. I feel like I'm part of the land around our house. Mom said I'm growing as fast as the corn and my cheeks are the color of ripe summer tomatoes in the winter. I wonder if my eyes are the color of broccoli stalks. We didn't plant any last year. She talks like that all the time, saying dead trees look like lightning strikes coming out of the ground, and storms are like huge oceans in the sky. She said Jack feels that way too. I asked how she could tell. She said to look at the way he stares across the fields and how he gives rocks to people. I always wondered why Mom had trouble looking him in the eye when they were in the same room. When she talked to him, she sounded just like I did when I'd just come in from feeding the chickens and carrying those buckets, like she was all out of breath.

A while ago, Jack came in. Mom had looked surprised. There was a lot to do, and I was happy to have him here. I was planting the garden and he was fun that day, laughing and saying that I should look to my own chickens and try to stay as white and as clean as they are. But when he offered to fix my feed bucket, Mom yelled that we could do just fine and fix things up ourselves, thank you.

Jack left, looking like he'd just bit on a cherry pit. When he was out of sight, Mom sat down on the top step. I asked her why she didn't want Jack to fix my bucket. Big tears rolled down to her lap. She just looked out to the road and said she was afraid.

Well I sure didn't see anything about Jack that would make me afraid. But after she went into the house, I sat for a long time. I remembered this spring. He'd come in from cleaning the barn. It had just rained, quick, with no lightning, just wetting things, but we could smell it from the kitchen. It was almost

evening and we'd waited supper for him. Mom had turned from the stove to set a pan of cornbread on the table. She slowed on the way to look at Jack standing by the back door. I thought she'd burn her hands and I thought he'd be hungry, but he was just standing. He was just looking out. Mom was too. Only she was doing it through Jack.

Things were different with Jack not around. Mom stared out the window a lot and told Cal not to come by any more. The corn got higher, and we wondered how we were going to get it all in. Then, maybe a couple of weeks ago, I watched Jack turn off the road, and come up to the house, with a wheel barrow. He thought I might need it for the chicken feed. It is pretty well beat up, but he said he'd paint it for me someday and I whispered my favorite color is red . . . but he was looking at Mom. She was all the way down the steps by that time, saying thanks for coming back to work. He looked at her like I'd seen him looking out at a field . . . like he was wide open, and he asked if he could stay.

The sunporch is Jack's for awhile, but I don't mind. He'll tell me when he finds one of those green bugs on the screen. He and Mom talk a lot more than they used to and Mom says I might get the sunporch back before fall comes.

I couldn't help to wish for something besides that red wagon. I couldn't help it after Jack went away.

Julie Hodges

Acting Out On the Wrong Stage

I met Ariana at the school auditions for the spring musical, *Jekyll and Hyde*. Originally, I hadn't intended to even try out for the play. I'd had bad experiences with acting in the past that made me vow to never act again. In an odd turn of events, an acquaintance, Amy, in one of my classes noticed me singing when the school held karaoke one night and encouraged me to audition. In fact, she practically begged me to come in because of the lack of interest in the tryouts. You see, Amy had been around me long enough to know my one weakness: if I'm capable of doing something, and no one else is willing to do it, I'll do it. I decided beforehand that the audition was going to be a waste of time, and took along my well-worn novelization of the Eighties B-movie "Warlock" to skim through when I got bored to the cafeteria with me.

There were very few people there. I sat on a table and waited to be handed a script. When it didn't arrive right away, I pulled the book from my pocket and began to read, and continued reading even when a script was plopped down onto the tabletop beside me. Then, I felt the apprehensive sensation that someone was standing behind me. "Warlock, huh? Cool."

I turned. She was taller than me, and very thin, a fact that somehow made her seem smaller than she was. She had a folder shoved under one arm, and I could clearly read the name "Ariana Trumboldt" on the front cover. Good. I was glad I wouldn't have to go through one of those insipid "Hi, I'm ——" introductions to her. She didn't look like the type who "did" introductions, anyway. Getting her to learn what my name was without being stupidly obvi-

ous was another matter. “Yeah,” I answered her question, “I like Julian Sands. Too bad he gets typecast in these stupid horror flicks and no one sees what a good actor he is.”

“Know what you mean,” she nodded. “You see *Impromptu*?” She spoke the title of another of his movies.

I was astounded, but I didn’t let my jaw drop like I wanted to. The best thing to do with really cool people, which this Ariana obviously was, was to play it cool. I thought I was the only one who knew who he was. “Of course,” I muttered. “He looked incredible in that movie.”

“Uh-huh.” With the brevity of her answer, I had the impression that she really wasn’t interested in talking to me anymore, or else I’d offended her by referring to his looks and not his acting. I would soon find out that this was simply the way she talks. The way she is.

“Katie DiMarco?” the director called, making me turn my head.

“That’s my cue,” I leaped from the table, grabbing the script.

I decided my aversion to having to rehearse day in and day out if I did get the part was no reason to do a shoddy job on purpose. If I could help the production, I would. I read passionately, reciting the lines of Jekyll’s love interest as if I understood the wants of her character.

When I was finished, the director, Prof. Engles, thanked me thoroughly. Then, I moped back to where I had been sitting. The magic of being somebody else was over.

“You were good,” Ariana acknowledged.

“Thanks.”

“Ariana Trumboldt?” Prof. Engles called.

“You’re up,” I said. “Good luck.”

“Hmm,” Ariana walked up to the cleared-away area at the front of the cafeteria. She was asked to read the part of the woman Hyde had taken advantage of. She started out in her low, unassuming voice, raising her tone as she went on, until her voice rang through the room. She was incredible. They asked her to sing, and she floored the small crowd of people assembled. She was a shoe-in for the part.

She left the “stage” and sat on the far side of the cafeteria. I should have known she wouldn’t sit anywhere near me. I’d never wanted to be friends with someone so much in my life. Wanting to be friends was such a gummy, childish

thing. Friendship isn't usually something that's planned with me, it's something that just happens. Something told me that Ariana wasn't the kind of person who had "friends," she had "people she hung out with".

As I was lost in my own thoughts, Prof. Engles conducted the last audition. He then announced the cast, cracking jokes all the way through. I turned to Ariana, looking to see if she was laughing. Should I laugh? I wondered. I was so preoccupied that I barely noticed it when he informed Ariana and me that we were to play the principal female roles.

"Hey," I said to her, taking the liberty no one else would. "Congratulations. You were . . . good."

"You, too."

"Hey, umm, do you want to come over sometime to go over the play, or something. I thought, since we are the only women in the play who have more than two lines," I bumbled. God, what am I doing, I asked myself. I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know how to ask someone to hang out with me.

"Where do you live?" My God, I was being accepted! I elaborated my location excitedly, while she nodded sagely at my directions.

That Friday, she came over. I kept my basement room pristine, not wanting to ruin any opinion of me she might have had. I was trying to hide my (slightly embarrassing) Eighties record collection when she came through the door. Glancing at the shameful vinyl in my hands, she said, "Duran Duran? Cool."

Whoa. I was "cool."

We had our lines memorized in a matter of four hours, she with her true dedication to her work, and me with my photographic memory. "Damn, I'm glad that's over," I mumbled, after the ordeal was finished. "You have to be anywhere soon?"

"No," she surveyed my video tape rack. "Hey, do you mind if we watch 'This Is . . . Spinal Tap?' She pointed to the gem in my collection of heavy metal spoofs.

Needless to say, I was dumbfounded that she knew the film. I popped up some microwave popcorn and we laughed through the whole movie. After that, it was a moral imperative that we watch "Attack of the Killer Tomatoes."

This was the beginning of our weekly movie fests. We watched everything, from film legends, like "Casablanca", "Citizen Kane," and "Braveheart," to cheesefests that were too bad to be called B movies, like "Silence of the Hams."

Unfortunately for my taste, I took a distinct leaning towards schlock, loving bad sci-fi and comedies filled to the brim with bad puns. Ariana liked low budget movies, but to call these things “schlock” was sacrilege.

Now and then, I’d lend her a book I’d finished. Sometimes, I tried to get a conversation out of her, but it was like trying to crush coal into a diamond with my bare hands; I needed to be some kind of superhero to accomplish it. So, I stayed quiet and watched the idiot box. I am her friend, I am. She just doesn’t say it . . . it’s understood, isn’t it?

On the night before opening night, we had a double feature: “*Sense and Sensibility*” and “*Monty Python and The Search For the Holy Grail*.” We laughed in the same room and cried in the same room (well, she sniffled a little). Not together.

Ari drove me to our first performance. I decided to test my superhero strength yet again.

Me: “Prof. Engles is funny, isn’t he? Always the jokes.”

Ari: “Huh? Oh, yeah. He’s weird. Fun.”

Squeeze. Gasp. I can’t do it.

The stage was set and pristine. The audience demanded everything we could give, like the spectators to some ancient sacrifice. I took a deep breath and stepped out as I was cued, resplendent in ruffles and lace. I didn’t relate to anyone on-stage or off. It was like being trapped in space, but I acted. Near the end of the play, Ari and I had a scene together. Her character came to mine for help just before she was killed. She clutched at my hands and raved desperately. It was unreality. We were far apart.

But, damn, could we ever act.

Robert Cox

The Old Man Sat

He looked ancient, which was understandable considering what he had gone through. His shoulders sagged and his hands hung lifeless at his sides. His blue eyes sparkled, not with the youthfulness and vigor that once coursed through them, but with freshly made tears. They welled up, yet he would not allow himself to cry.

His rumpled gray suit hung from him as if it were still on the hanger he had taken it off of twenty-four short hours ago. The tie, which was made of expensive navy blue silk, was now pulled loose and hung askew from his neck, the knot no longer taut. The top button of his white Stafford shirt was unbuttoned, and the flesh of his neck hung as lifeless as a sail with no wind to fill it. The creases of his slacks were no longer knife-sharp, as they usually were; they were now crumpled and in dire need of a pressing. One of his stockings had fallen down around his ankle, exposing yellow-white aged skin. His shoes no longer shone brighter than a freshly waxed linoleum floor; dull and unnoticeable, their luster had been washed away.

The old man's countenance was as wrinkled and disheveled as his clothes. His ashen face hung as if all of the events of the past day were weighing upon it. His mouth hung slack and his lips were as pale as his face. His eyes showed no emotion. Dull, they stared expressionless at the object in front of him. The blue had seemed to drain out of them and left him only with gray, sightless eyes. His white hair was oily and clung tightly to his ancient skull.

Nothing about the old man resembled his previous self. Now he was only a cold, dark shadow that felt nothing because of its unfeeling blackness. The only feeling the old man had was of emptiness, which was as black and deep as the shadow which he was becoming. Everything around him disappeared and his

vision through those once-blue eyes focused on only one object—that which was in front of him.

Soon, the old man no longer saw the what was on the bed in front of him; his thoughts began to wander. He had enjoyed his life. He praised God for every day that he was allowed to have. Material things meant nothing to the old man; he would have been perfectly happy sitting in the cool, green grass under a brisk early fall sky with nothing more than his beautiful wife sitting by his side—it was the simple things that made life grand. He and his wife had done that many times, even in their old age. Life without her was not life, only a hollow empty shell that masqueraded as life.

Technically life was being alive, with a beating heart and a functioning brain, but it was so much more. The old man believed in this strongly. It was the birds singing melodious tunes outside the kitchen window on a pleasant summer day. It was holding the person you loved in your arms knowing that she would never leave, and that you would never let go. It was noticing a warm smile and enjoying an orange and red sunset. It was answering “I do.”. It was holding hands and walking down the aisle of a movie theater in the dark, looking for two open seats, hoping that you wouldn’t accidentally sit in someone’s lap. Life was trying to find a parking spot at the county fair. It was staring at a picture, remembering. It was touching an object, meaningless to others, that reminded you of the woman with whom you wanted to spend your life. It was saying “I love you” and meaning it.

Life was much more than the physiological side. There was an emotional side as well. It was so much, yet gone so fast. This haunting idea now became a terrifying reality as the old man cleared his throat and stood.

He thought of the way his wife felt in his arms. How her lips were never cold, always warm, and how they warmed him when they touched his. He could remember how they danced together at his senior prom and how beautiful she still looked even at the end of that long night—although she insisted she didn’t. She had shone brighter than any of the stars on that perfectly clear night. Her smile was infectious, and no matter how mad he got, his anger would quickly fade when confronted with it.

Growing old together was something that they had both enjoyed. They didn’t mind aging, they embraced it as they embraced each other and accepted it as they accepted everything else in their lives together. Sixty years ago they

had both been young, vital people that dreamt of nothing more than loving one another. They were married, but that was merely a formality, only to make it legal. In their own mind they had been married the first time that they had caught a glimpse of one another. Although she felt he was a jerk at first, and he felt she was a bitch, they nonetheless discovered the true identity of one another and instantly fell in love.

He was captivated by her medium length brown hair and her deep brown eyes. She had a girlish quality about her that radiated youth. Her smile was always warm and her lips were always inviting. Her body needed no work at all. She was lean but not skinny, petite but not short, and athletic but not muscular. Every time he had envisioned the woman he wanted to marry her image appeared, and when he finally met her he knew that she was the one.

Sixty years of happiness was more than any one person deserved, but God had given it to the old man and his wife and they were always thankful. As they grew older, and weaker, so did their love grow newer and stronger. They would never part, they vowed to one another.

Their children had all grown up and moved away, leaving the old man and his wife with nothing but one another. The fact that they believed they would be there for one another always was no strange thing. They needed to believe it because they only had each other. In fact, they could not even consider life without the other. He seemed to know, however, that they would never have to be apart. He didn't know why that conviction was so strong within him but it was. Maybe it was because after sixty years it was difficult to see things any other way. Maybe it was because they told each other that they would always be there. He didn't know. He liked to think that God could never do that to him or his wife; they seemed to have an understanding on this issue. His wife, though, always said that "To understand God was to be Him," which meant that only God could understand God. The old man would nod in understanding about what she said but his mind's eye would always manage to wink. This thought, though, was what he based his life upon. He didn't claim that he understood everything that God did to him. He just took the hard times in stride and celebrated the good times.

The love he had for her could not be explained with ordinary words. It coursed deep within him. . . it was him. His love for her was something that not everyone was privileged enough to experience. He was proud to have some-

thing nobody else had. He would do anything for his wife. Dying for her was not debatable; of course he would die for her. He did not ever want to let go of his love for her and he would do anything to protect it and her.

Now the old man stood. Motionless. Staring at the object on the bed that had transfixed him for the past twenty-four hours. Actually for the past sixty years. His wife lie in front of him, his beautiful, wonderful, irreplaceable wife.

Everything was white. The hospital walls, the hospital sheets, it was all depressingly white. Even his wife, the woman he adored, was white. Her face was drained of any color and it matched her colorless, wispy hair. Her lips were pursed tightly against her teeth as if in a grim, humorless smile. She had become small, even skeletal. The object on this bed was not his wife. It didn't even resemble her. Then her eyelids fluttered and opened and he saw his wife in all her beauty. Looking deep into those eyes the old man could see her beauty on the days which seemed so long ago, the smile that always made him love her more. It was all there. She looked at him but seemed not to see him.

He managed something that resembled a smile.

She tried to speak but her throat was too dry. He got her a glass of water from the bedside pitcher and a straw from a drawer in the bureau next to the bed. He put the straw to her dry, cracked lips.

She sipped loudly and with much effort. She closed her eyes from the strain and finally collapsed back against the white, fluffed up pillow. Her head was so light that it hardly made a dent in the soft headrest. The old man set the glass back onto the bureau.

Breathing deeply, she attempted to speak again.

Could this really be the woman he fell in love with so long ago? Yes it was. He felt no less love than ever before, maybe he felt more. This woman was his life and he would never abandon her—ever—much less question her identity.

She whispered something: unidentifiable. He watched as she swallowed and prepared to try to speak again.

The old man took her hand in his. It was bony and cold. Hardly a hand. He closed his eyes and bowed his head.

"Dear God," he prayed, "it's me again. I need to ask a favor. Don't take my wife from me. She is my life. Always has been. I need her more than anything. Lord, I beg of you, please don't take her from me. I'll do anything you want me to do. This is all I ask."

His voice trembled and cracked with a sincere emotion that he had never felt before. It did not, however, eclipse the love he felt so strongly for his wife.

“Please don’t take her. I know that it goes ‘Thy will be done’ but please, just this once, let my will be done. It can’t be a big deal to you. Just a snap of Your fingers is all it takes. It may be small for You but it’s everything to me. This is all I want. Just this. Please do this for me, God. Please. Amen.”

This was really all he wanted. It was all he ever wanted in his entire life. The old man knew that God would hear him. He could feel it.

Once again she said something that was not decipherable but it sounded somewhat stronger, a murmur instead of a whisper.

The old man was still on the verge of tears, yet he had not cried. He had to be strong for the woman he loved. He could not give in to tears because that would be giving in to weakness. He had been strong all of his life and he was not about to give in now.

Around him were the sounds of a typical hospital. Intercom pagings, beepings of machines, the metallic hiss of a respirator. All this was going on, yet neither he nor his wife of sixty years could hear it.

This cannot be happening; it’s all a dream. The old man closed his eyes and hoped to wake up sweating, in a bed with his only love. When he raised his eyelids, though, he realized that he was stuck in this reality, which confirmed his worst fears.

His wife had since given up on speaking. She now seemed alert, despite the drugs she was pumped full of. The old man realized that this state of alertness may not last long so he squeezed her hand lightly to remind her that he was there.

She looked up at him and he could see the wave of concern sweep over her face. Good God, he thought, she’s the one in the hospital and I’m the one she’s worried about. Then their eyes met and he was filled with a tremendous blast of love that engulfed him. That was when the stark reality of what exactly was happening hit him. It drove the breath right out of him and he gasped. He knew what was going to happen.

He smiled down at her and she, weak as she was, smiled back. It was the most beautiful smile he had ever seen in his life. That smile would live with him always.

“I love you . . .”, she whispered to him, “forever.”

Then she closed her eyes.

The old man bent down over her, still holding her hand, and put his lips to hers. They were still warm, as they always had been.

“I love you too,” he told her unhearing ears, “I love you too.”

Then he knelt down, bowed his head and, not feeling the need to be strong anymore, let go.

Finally, the old man cried.

James R. Norris

The Herd

He heard it off in the distance, the one sound he had longed so much to hear. He stopped in mid-stride from his smooth run to listen again. Yes! There it was, the far off bellowing of a huge male bison. One hundred and fifty people's lives depended on that sound and on this one warrior's skill. He had tracked the herd for two weeks over the hot, dry Montana badlands. He thought about how crafty the lead male of the herd was and how it had led him through a labyrinth of mountains, mesas, arroyos and around huge piles of rocks. That lead male almost seemed to know that some thing, some one had been following his herd.

Overhead a red-tail hawk screamed his warning and Shadow Elk started running again. As he ran he adjusted his six-inch long flint knife blade into a more secure place in the waistband of his loincloth. His firehorn slapped at his side, hanging from a long strand of braided sinew. He carried with him only the barest of essentials, only those tools which would not impede him in his duty. As he rounded the side of a giant rock slide he began to pick up the smell of the herd and he kicked his heels into the sand just a little bit harder. He leaned forward into the stride and he felt something bounce off of his chest and instantly he thought of his wife.

On a leather thong about his neck he wore a single bead carved out of a piece of buffalo leg bone. He smiled as he thought about her, her hair long and flowing, so dark and shiny, as dark as the bird after which she was named. Little Raven had carved that bead for him, a gift on their wedding day. He remembered looking at her tiny hands and seeing the angry red blisters and deep cuts she earned from using pieces of flint to carve the rock-hard bone. He remembered noticing that she had worn her fingerprints away using wet sand

to polish the bead. And he remembered her sweet smell as she drew him close and placed the beaded thong around his neck. He reached up and touched the bead, feeling it, smooth and flawless . . . and as he felt it, it seemed to give him just a little more strength.

The importance of his task came smashing back to him, almost like a lightning bolt, stripping away his heady thoughts of love. The most important thing now was not to alert the herd. He forced himself to slow down as the smell of the herd became stronger. He knew they could not be more than a mile or two away now. He prayed that the wind would not shift and carry his scent to that wary lead male. He reminded himself that he needed to be deadly cautious now, because, literally, every important thing in his world depended on his stalking and killing skills. The people had not had meat for over three months. The drought, along with the hunger, had reduced even the strongest warriors to weakened shells, lying in silence and waiting to die. The bison herds had left, no one knew why, but all those in the tribe had done their best to hunt, trap and gather enough food to survive. After a while though, even the rabbits were all gone and the people were reduced to eating grasshoppers and lizards. In time, even those meager blessings vanished. Thus, 150 people were left, isolated, in one of this planet's harshest environments to die one of nature's most cruel deaths . . . death by starvation.

Shadow Elk did not kid himself as he worked his way up to the top of the sandstone ridge. He knew in his heart that he had not mustered up the strength to leave on this hunt for the good of the tribe. He knew that he was not forcing his weakened body to keep moving out of some noble responsibility to the common good of his people. As much as he would have liked to feel those commitments and sentiments, he knew in his heart that there was only one reason he kept on moving and refused to give up. That reason lay safely tucked away within the belly of his wife. She was due to give birth at any time and Shadow Elk knew that if she had no food she could not nurse the child. The child. The child was the reason.

As he slid on his belly to edge of the ridge-top he knew they were there. One eye carefully peeked over the precipice and he saw them. About 200, large, much larger than the bison of today, (the bison of 10,000 years ago were 30 to 40 percent larger than modern bison) and they were calmly grazing, showing no signs that they were aware of his presence. As he watched the herd, one

huge male caught his eye. It was most definitely the lead male, the king of the herd. He was even bigger than the biggest bison Shadow Elk had ever seen, so old that his coat was no longer dark brown, but a sort of bleached-out tan color. Despite his obvious age though, this old warrior knew his job. He jealously stood guard outside the herd, marching back and forth, looking and listening and smelling the wind for the slightest hint of danger. His job was and always had been to protect the herd. Shadow Elk knew that the slightest sound from him or the faintest shift of the wind would throw that big male into a frenzy and the whole herd would disappear.

It was a stroke of fortune that the herd was grazing just a few hundred yards from a sheer drop-off carved out of the arid Montana landscape by some long-forgotten river. Shadow Elk had only the barest hope of startling the herd and steering one or two of them off of that cliff face. He was well aware that it usually took at least ten or fifteen hunters to steer a herd in any given direction. He knew his odds of success were minimal, but he had to try. So, he crawled on his belly to the far west side of the plateau. The herd still grazed contentedly as the lone hunter sat and surveyed the situation. There was only one chance. He calculated that he might be able to start a fire in the prairie grass on the far west flank of the herd and then run as fast as he could around the back of the herd and start a fire on the far east flank. Then, if everything went right, he could hopefully run to a spot in between the two fires before the herd bolted and, maybe, just maybe he could make enough commotion to push a few back to the north and over the cliff. The odds were better though, that without ten or so other hunters to frighten the herd they would probably run right between those two fires and trample whatever was in their path. As he pulled his firehorn around he knew that the next few moments would either insure the future of his wife, child and the tribe, or it would mean . . . extinction for an entire band of human beings.

He opened the hollowed bison horn and spilled out some of the sand and moss inside of it. Out with the sand fell a tiny smoldering ember. He grabbed a handful of dried grass, thrust the ember into it and blew, gently at first, and then more vigorously as the grass began to smoke. He blew, steadily, not too soft and yet not too hard. Then, poof! It ignited as he tossed it to the ground and piled some more grass on it. He crammed the top back into the firehorn and ran. He ran as fast as his legs could carry him, back around the huge pile of

rocks that stood between the herd and the south wind. As he rounded the rocks on the east side of the herd he saw that the wind was still carrying the smoke from the other fire away from the herd. "Good," he thought. The lone hunter angled his way toward the southeast in order to insure that he would not draw the herd's attention to himself. Finally, he reached the spot where he wanted to be. He dropped to his knees in the grass and pulled his firehorn around, his fingers shaking, his heart beating so hard that it was almost impossible to hold the handful of grass steady as he began to blow on it. Then he heard it . . . thunder.

"Oh, no", he thought, "it's going to rain and my fires will be washed away." And without the fires he knew he had no power to kill even one bison. He listened again as the thunder seemed to get closer. He whipped his head around just in time to see 3,000 pounds of hair and hooves and horns bearing down on him. It was the lead male! Shadow Elk high-jumped backwards just as those horns met his body. His initial momentum lessened the thrust of those deadly black horns and, in effect, helped flip him out of the way of the razor sharp hooves as they flew by his head. The big fellow was traveling so fast that it took him about fifty yards to slow to a stop and turn around. As Shadow Elk picked himself up he saw the bison facing him and watching him with eyes as red as the glowing embers in the bundle of grass that he still held in his hand. Then he charged again. The sound was awesome . . . it was like four simultaneous claps of thunder repeating itself every split second. And the bellowing was terrifying, almost freezing the hunter's blood right in his veins.

Overhead the red-tail hawk watched a drama unfold like no drama witnessed before or since. As he stretched his wings out to catch more of the thermal current he saw the huge bison running full-speed toward the hunter. And the human was doing something very strange. He was standing totally still, not even trying to get away. The raptor screeched and Shadow Elk looked up to it for a split second, then his eyes slammed back to his hands where the bundle of grass was beginning to smoke. In the blink of an eye he pulled the wad of grass up to his face, blew on it, and as it ignited he sidestepped the oncoming mountain of fury and shoved the flaming grass into the eyes of the old guardian. He tried to pull his arm back away in time, but one horn caught his forearm and tore a horrific bloody gash in it.

The bison fared far worse though, it literally flipped over headfirst, his eyes

burnt and blinded as the hair around his face caught fire and blazed up. And when he rolled over, the bone-dry grass caught fire all around him. Shadow Elk didn't hang around to watch. He knew he had to run back to the center point of the two fires to keep the herd from escaping to the south. He ran so hard that he thought his legs would break and when he finally got to where he wanted to be the herd had already started moving toward him. They came at him . . . and he screamed. He screamed at the top of his lungs and jumped as high as he could. He jumped up and down and waved his arms hoping that some irrational fear would arise in just one member of the herd to make it turn and run north.

It didn't work, the herd kept running south toward him. He knew it was over as he dropped to his knees and started to sing his death song. He stretched his arms up to the sky and felt the ground quake as the herd drew within trampling range of him. Then the oddest thing happened. The whole stampede stopped. The herd looked right at him and he thought he was witnessing some miracle. Until he heard a snort behind him.

The lead male had circled around him and even though he couldn't see the hunter through his seared eyes he had located him by his scent. And he was bearing down on him, still as determined as ever to squash this threat to his kingdom. That is what stopped the herd . . . as they were running south out of the trap, they met their leader running north and they stopped to see where he would lead them. Shadow Elk jumped to his feet and once again waited for the charging buffalo to get almost to him before he leapt out of the way. The sightless old male smashed past him and flew into the herd, running so hard and so fast, in such a rage, that he soared right over the edge of that cliff. The herd turned and followed him.

A smile beamed on the hunter's face as he crawled down into the braying mass of dead and dying animals. He found a young cow and jammed his flint blade into her ear to still her dying convulsions, then he pried her mouth open and cut out her tongue. Despite the twenty-nine bones in the tongue of a bison it was considered the tastiest part of the animal. He would take this treat back to his wife and he would carry enough flesh back to give strength to ten or so others who could then make their way to the kill site and begin the butchering process for the whole tribe. His heart soared. There was enough food here to feed his entire band for two months or more.

As he jogged across the plains, back toward his tribe, his mind was filled with visions of his wife and thoughts of his soon-to-be-born child. A day later he saw his village growing closer in the sweltering heat. Someone was walking out to greet him. It was Running Dog, his best friend. "Hey! Shadow Elk . . . you got meat!"

Shadow Elk held out his hand and said "Yes! A good kill, many animals! Look, I have even brought a special gift for Little Raven! The tongue of a fat young cow so she and my child may grow strong." Running Dog fell to his knees and started to weep. Shadow Elk rubbed his shoulder and said "Don't worry, old friend, there is plenty more meat back at the kill site."

Running Dog looked up and said . . . "It's not that . . . Little Raven . . . she died yesterday." Shadow Elk felt his legs give out beneath him and before he passed out he saw the hot Montana sand rushing up to slam him in the face.

I was spitting that same sand out of my mouth as I came to. I heard someone calling me off in the distance. "Jim . . . Jim . . . you got that mound excavated yet? Did'ja find anything? God-damn it boy, you been out here two days and nights all by yerself." It was Dr. Fredrickson, senior archeologist on the trip and he had assigned me to this spot which was about ten miles away from the rest of the dig. As he walked up to me he said . . . "Are you cryin' boy? What the hell's wrong?" I pointed to the hole. He walked over and looked inside to see the 10,000-year-old skeleton of a twenty-year-old woman. In her right hand was a delicately carved bone bead and around her neck was a strand of twenty-nine buffalo tongue bones. And there, nestled between the bottom of her ribs and her pelvis, with one leg bent strangely back, was a tiny fetal skeleton. Dr. Fredrickson looked up at me and all he could say was "Oh."

He didn't object as I fell to my knees and started carefully placing handfuls of that hallowed ground back into the hole. He knew, as did I, that this was one site that belonged on no map. He knew and I knew that this secluded spot, high on a hill deserved to keep it's secrets for another 10,000 years. After the hole was filled in and the surface camouflaged so no modern soul would ever find it again. . . . I stood there, with tears streaming down my face, the burnt orange sun sinking behind me as the most giant snow-white moon I ever saw rose to dominate those craggy brown mesa tops. And I swear to this day, that as I knelt down to place a withered old prairie flower on that grave . . . I heard the distant sound of thundering hooves.



Nancy Howell

Poetry and Poetics

Robert Cox

Nancy Howell

Dawn M. Rodriguez

Arthur J. Curry

Julie Hodges

Jody Kingery

Donna Hale

Robert Cox

Painted Pure

Glancing out of the window

I see it.

Funny, unlike its

brothers or sisters

there is no sound.

It grinds under my boots

as I stroll into the blissful peace.

Stillness vibrates around me.

The soft quiet thumps inside my head.

Like tiny bits of bleached velvet,

falling upon a cloth of satin:

flakes float and rest upon the ground.

Lazily, the world is painted pure.

Robert Cox

Fishing

I once was fishing,
the day was warm, the sun was bright,
When a man came walking to the water's edge,
(he seemed to give off his own light).
He called to me,
"Caught anything?"
"No," I replied.
"Turn in your boat, then, and fish the other side."
I turned and cast my line
to the other side as he said,
Then the sky turned dark, and stormy,
and the water turned red.
Up from the water the fish
seemed to fly,
And I stared in amazement,
and I looked to the sky.
Through the clouds one beam of light
came to shine,
And I couldn't tell if the water on my face
was rain,
or mine.
My boat was filled with fish,
it barely stayed afloat,
So I took out my oars
and to safety began to row.
Then I remembered the man on the beach,

his hair long and brown,
I looked for him;
but he was no where to be found.
To this day I wish I had asked his secret;
expressed to him my thanks,
So now everyday that I go fishing,
I look for him on the banks.

Nancy Howell

Web Cite

On a backdrop of sky
Pulses a small web
Whose elected lines
Speak to the orbits

Of the Bohr atom
Where the spider
Rests, centered
In ground state

Having just emitted
A spectral display
And now drawn
To its prey

The spider slips
Gold sky, leaving
The center bright
As the earth once

Slipped solar pattern
Leaving the sun
Centered in a web
Not long ago

Dawn M. Rodriguez

Mutation

Here I lie
In isolation;
Unable to roam
My neighboring habitat,
But for some instinctive reason
I forbade the comfort
Of others
Like me.

My mother I never knew-
She left my brothers
My sisters
And me
To fend for ourselves
In the real world.

In my blanketed state,
I can see activity passing
By the translucent fibers of my prison.
I can feel my body
Swaying in the sun-warmed breeze.
I am not sure when,
But one day I will soar
Through the wind.
Its frightening to think
I'll be making this big step

In life
All by myself.

This long period of desolate comings
Has make me anxious to search
For my freedom.
I feel like soaring,
Moving now.
There goes and antennae;
There goes the other.
My legs-a century number,
Have dwindled
To only
Six.

Light
Begins to
Seep through iridescent fibers
And the warmth of outdoors is inviting.
Peering out,
I see
The Mother Nature
I left behind.
I am different now.
Unrecognized.
I start my journey
To harvest the dainty sun children.
I am important now.
I am no longer
In an unlovable caterpillar-state,
But a captivatingly
Beautiful
Blue,
Gold,
Brown
Monarch.

Arthur J. Curry

Weeding

I hate Mondays.
I always weed on Monday.
First I pour life on the chosen ones,
Making sure they have drunk full.
Then with the soil soft and supple,

I start to slash.
I cut deep so the wounds kill.
I am not prejudiced.
I do as I am ordered.
I do not hate that which I slay.

I see their beauty,
Their flowers so full and powerful.
I feel their strength,
As they grip the earth begging for life.
I know their love,
Which they spread through their seeds.

Once I hid one inside my shirt
Taking it away from the garden.
I placed it safe away from the others.
But, it grew too big too strong too black.
I was forced to murder it in all its splendor.

If I let them live,
The soft ones will be forced out.
They can not exist, it is the law.
Yet, each Monday they are there,
Pushing through the surface, talking to me.
I hate Mondays.

Julie Hodges

Faerie Tale: An Epilogue

“I wish we could have been friends,”
I thought, as we two sat down to tea,
but I loved the hero, and she’d loved the villain,
so, how could that be?

She spoke. “Let us not talk of villains nor heroes,
that time has been past for long,
let us now talk only of men.
I believe you were in the wrong.”

“What? Your ‘man’ was a monster past
feeling. “Not so,” said she, “even villains have souls.
Heroes, though their hearts lie correct
are decidedly lacking in goals.”

“The job of your self-righteous hero,”
she went on, “is simply to ruin our plans.
We had our designs to rule a kingdom
which were far more clever and grand.”

“Yet, I do not blame him, for that he
couldn’t understand, since he walks the mortal track.
His soul’s no more incandescent
than my man’s was black.”

“’Tis my fault, then for lifting him,” I replied,
“over that which he is.” She consoled, “Do not weep so,

Your fault was no greater than mine.
Loving a villain is no better than making a false hero.”

Thus, we were even.
I smiled as I heard the castle walls creak,
and in crystal fragments, begin to fall.
This discussion could wait for another century,
and we were not so different, after all.

Jody Kingery

(Untitled)

My eyes deceive me as
my soul soars free
locked
forever in this dream.
Sensing the truth
screaming for release
seeking an end an
awakening from this sleep.
Soul outreaching
for an escape, I bide
my time
waiting for the light
to shatter the darkness
that holds me
seeking the truth
through the facade
of perfect life.
I plan my escape
as the bell tolls
flying for freedom
my soul escapes
into reality
a new day begun.

Donna Hale

Victimization in Literature

The word “scapegoat” refers to a person who suffers because of another person’s misdeeds, crimes or actions. It is obvious from this definition that a scapegoat is a victim. The two words, however, are not interchangeable because a victim is not always a scapegoat. The underlying factor here is power. Scapegoats are always powerless. They have no power or control over what is happening to them and suffer because of no fault of their own. Victims, however, may or may not have the power to take control of their own destiny and change the course of their lives. Their suffering can be a result of something they have done, knowingly or unknowingly.

In *Tartuffe*, by Molière, the most obvious scapegoats are Marianne and Valere, the young couple who are in love and wish to be married. Because of the foolishness of the young girl’s father—Orgon—their wishes are crushed (28). Orgon is deceived into believing that Tartuffe is a good, honest man and orders his daughter to marry him. In reality, he is a hypocrite and a trickster. The young couple’s powerlessness derives from the fact that Marianne, without question, must submit to her father’s authority (32). The young age of the couple also attributes to their lack of power to change the situation. Likewise, *Memory of the Night of the Fourth*, written by Hugo, contains a striking example of a scapegoat. In this case a young child who was a threat to no one is senselessly killed by Napoleon’s soldiers who stormed through Paris rampantly shooting to discourage any opposition to the populace (678). As with Marianne and Valere in

Tartuffe, this victim suffers because of his young age and innocence and is without the power to control the events that take place in his life. Margaret, in Goethe's *Faust*, similarly is victimized by Faust because of her innocence and naiveness. In the words of Faust, Margaret is, "innocent and simple" (531). Faust thinks of Margaret as an object which he can possess for his own pleasures (519). She suffers as a result of Faust's solipsism. The protagonist, Faust, in Goethe's masterpiece, Dostoevsky's main character in *Notes from Underground* and Ivan in Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, likewise are victims. What separates them from the three scapegoats—Marianne, Valere and the small boy, and from Margaret—Faust's unfortunate victim—is the fact that they possess the power to control the events in their lives.

The extent of the victimization among the characters in these five literary works and how they fell into victimization varies greatly and is in direct correlation to the amount of power they have (if any) and how they use it. As seen above, the young couple from *Tartuffe* and the small child from *Memory of the Night of the Fourth* possess no power at all due to their youthfulness and innocence. However, the outcome for these victims is very different. Being a domestic comedy, which is small scale and prevails in folly, *Tartuffe* allows for the use of a stock character known as the *dues ex machina*. The *dues ex machina* is sent from heaven and miraculously "saves the day." In the case of *Tartuffe* an officer of the king appears taking the notorious hypocrite to prison and delivering the young couple from victimization (66). In the end, Orgon gives Valere and Marianne his blessing for their marriage (67) and happiness abounds. In contrast, the killing of the small eight year old boy in *Memory of the Night of the Fourth* is quite tragic and there is no miracle to save him from the two bullets that senselessly take his young life (678).

In *Faust*, Margaret becomes a victim of the loneliness of her simple life which she refers to as "rather plain" (532). Likewise, her romantic feelings towards Faust make her easy prey. She loves Faust and believes he loves her in return (533-534). Unlike Marianne, Valere and the little boy, Margaret is not a true scapegoat because her victimization comes about partly because she chooses to give in to her desires and make love with Faust when she knows that it is not an acceptable act outside of marriage (528). Margaret's circumstance can be viewed as falling into a trap and the consequences of this entrapment are, as in *Memory*

of the Night of the Fourth, quite tragic. In the end, Margaret commits a heinous act of drowning her illegitimate child—an innocent, helpless baby who is victimized by Margaret as a result of her victimization by Faust. She suffers greatly for this horrendous sin by being locked in a dungeon in chains, sentenced to death and deteriorating to madness (565). What little power she may have had to take control of her life is now banished. In contrast to the pathetic, cold-blooded killing of the innocent child who in *Memory of the Night of the Fourth* has no escape from death, Margaret is liberated by a voice from heaven and her spirit is saved (569). This “last minute” deliverance is similar to the use of the *dues ex machina* in *Tartuffe* to free the young couple from their victimization, yet, in *Faust*, the magnitude of the tragedy is much greater and Margaret’s suffering is much more horrifying.

Unlike the naive, innocent victims, Faust is a very educated, intelligent and sophisticated man who practically invites victimization into his life. He grows weary of his scholarly life where, surrounded by intellectual papers, journals and books, he acquires wisdom, yet, yearns for something more (468). What Faust desires in his uneventful life, is experience, adventure and excitement. Faust pursues experience by making a pact with Mephistopheles—the devil’s agent who lies to Faust, telling him that doing evil creates good (489). By signing a contract in his own blood, Faust makes a willful decision to exchange his eternal life for worldly pleasures and experiences which are to be introduced to him through Mephistopheles. Contrary to the five victims—Marianne, Valere, the little boy, Margaret and her helpless infant who have little or no power—Faust has unmitigated power over the events in his life. He becomes a victim of Mephistopheles by his own doing. On several occasions Mephistopheles gives Faust the opportunity to reconsider the pact by requesting permission to leave from the presence of Faust. On one such occasion, Mephistopheles says, “For now I ask the single boon, that you permit me to go” (491). In this instance, as in others, Faust beckons him to stay, willingly making himself the monster’s prey. The extent to which Faust suffers contrasts to that of the other victims mentioned.

Faust’s suffering occurs towards the end of the play when he realizes the immense torture and horror he afflicted upon Margaret because of his superbia

and selfish desires (566-69). His suffering is not physical as is Margaret's, her illegitimate child and the innocent little boy in *Memory of the Night of the Fourth*, and it is not nearly as pathetic. However, through death, the suffering of Margaret, her baby and the little boy comes to an end, just as there is an end to the suffering of the scapegoats in *Tartuffe*. Faust, on the contrary, must continue to suffer. He must live with the mental anguish of what he has done to Margaret and how his complete self-centeredness resulted in the horrifying death of his innocent child.

Like Faust, and in contrast to the younger, unwilling victims, Dostoevsky's underground man possesses the power to control his own life. His power, however, is hindered due to what he refers to as a "full-fledged, genuine disease"—a super consciousness (1128). His victimization stems from this undesirable affliction of a super consciousness which developed, he believes, as a result of his education and intellectual achievements which are to be praised by society, but are what actually makes him an outcast from society (1129). This isolation is the underground man's ultimate source of suffering and because of his unyielding consciousness, he cannot be freed from this suffering. Unlike Faust, who is given opportunities to make changes, the underground man is unable to transform his life because he spends so much time considering every little detail and debating with himself so intensely that he never gets around to initiating any changes that may free him from this isolation. As a result of his super-consciousness, the underground man feels he can become nothing. He verbalizes this idea when he says, "Now I live out my days in my corner taunting myself with the spiteful and entirely useless consolation that an intelligent man cannot seriously become anything . . ." (1127). So, for the underground man, his suffering does not end in death as with Margaret, her child and the young boy or with a miraculous deed as in *Tartuffe*, rather, like Faust, he must continue living and, for these two characters, living is suffering.

Whereas Dostoevsky's underground man is afflicted with an overbearing consciousness which causes him to scrutinize and ponder every little detail in every situation, Ivan in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* does not even think about what he is doing or why he is doing something. In contrast to the underground man, who is a social outcast, Ivan is a complete social conformist. Everything he does

in life he does because it is socially acceptable, which makes him a victim of society. For example he even gets married, not out of love, but because it is considered the right thing to do by his associates (1216). In contrast to Faust who is dissatisfied with his ordinary, socially acceptable life and seeks pleasure and experience outside the realm of what is customary, Ivan is content with his hollow, mediocre life. Because Ivan does not examine his life or think about his day to day actions, which he performs so mechanically, he does not even suspect that he is a victim. This aspect of Ivan's life contrasts sharply to the underground man's bitter, haunting and ever-present awareness that he is a victim. In contrast to the scapegoats who are completely powerless and Margaret who is stripped of what little power she has, Ivan, like Faust and the underground man, has the power to change his life. Ivan, however, never sees the need to use this power because he blindly plods through life doing all the right things, fulfilling "what he considered to be his duty: and he considered his duty to be what was so considered by those in authority" (1215). The victimization in Ivan's life, is comparable to the victimization of Margaret, her baby and the young boy, in that, the end result is death. His suffering, however, is not as horrendous as Margaret's or as tragic as the small boy's, but it is quite pathetic, mainly because of what is revealed to him through his suffering. It is in dying that Ivan discovers how meaningless his life has been: how his drive to always do the appropriate thing has really not been the right way to live at all. He realizes, too late, that his life has been a "huge deception that has hidden both life and death from him" (1248-1250). When this realization hits him, it is too late to rectify the emptiness of his life. In contrast to Margaret's soul being redeemed and taken to heaven at the end of her life on earth, Ivan has no such deliverance. He has no escape from a death of agony (1245), a death which reveals the terrible truth about his life.

Several different types of victims have been seen. The victimization of the young and innocent, who suffer by no fault of their own, is the hardest to understand – especially in such tragic circumstances as the little boy in Hugo's *Memory of the Night of the Fourth* and the helpless newborn in *Faust* who have never caused harm to anyone. Sadly, these types of appalling situations where the innocent and powerless are victimized, occur every day and, unfortunately, will

continue to occur until the end of time. Then, there are those victims at the other extreme, like Faust, who have control over the circumstances in their lives and, yet, they choose actions that will lead them into victimization. These types of victims will also be in existence until the end of time, but at least in this type of victimization, they have the power to choose—to be a victim or not to be.



Nancy Howell

Essays

Jodi Sobecki

Carina Atherton-Lira

Arthur J. Curry

Shawn O'Neil

Maureen B. Dolan

Donna Hale

Jodi Sobecki

The Nun From Hell

First, she would chase me with an ax which was always dripping with blood. Down the hallways of St. Stanislaus School I would run. I could hear each thundering footstep as she pursued me. But that laugh – that high-pitched, wicked cackle as she shrieked “I’ll get you! I’ll get you all!” was the absolute worst.

Finally she corners me, swings the ax over her head, then . . . I would always wake up in a cold sweat right there every time. Night after night, during my entire fifth-grade year, I would have that same nightmare. It was bad enough I had to put up with her all day at school, but I often wondered why she had to invade my solitude while I slept. I think it would be safe to say that most of us, as children, never really got a thrill out of getting up and going to school. For those of us in Sister Mary Annina’s fifth-grade class, however, it was downright hell.

Just looking at this woman was enough to send chills down anyone’s spine. She was pushing 80, about 5’2”, and had to weigh in at around 250 pounds. She dressed like any other nun, always wearing black or navy polyester clothes with a matching veil which served as a cover for her blue hair. Shadowing her red, blotchy, pale face was the thickest pair of black horn-rimmed glasses I’d ever seen. Her most outstanding feature, next to the ruler she always carried in her hand, was the huge silver cross worn around her neck at all times.

The very first thing we did every morning when we arrived at school was go to church. Every one of us had to sit up straight, sing loud, pray hard, and “repent for all the evil we had engaged in during the course of the night.” I recall a time when Joey Kowalski got fidgety during a sermon. That old woman jumped right out of her pew and dragged Joey out the back door of the church by the ear. Never again did he fidget during mass. That was royal treatment

compared to what happened to those who didn't have their homework ready on time. More than once David Pularski had forgotten his homework, and the sound of "ruler swatting rump" still echoes in my head.

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness" was the motto Sr. Mary Annina lived by. God forbid, and I mean that literally, that any one of her pupils keep a messy desk. It brings to mind the time she "helped" Nicole Jasnecki clean out her desk by dumping it all over the floor. She then whipped out a cigarette lighter, threatening to torch the mess. She never did set it on fire, but I'll never forget Nicole's endless stream of tears that morning. To this day I still wonder where she got the lighter, but I'm guessing it's the same place she got the screwdriver. One day at recess Sr. Mary Annina caught Melissa Jacobs picking her nose. She produced a small screwdriver from her pocket and nonchalantly asked, "Need some help there, girly?"

Not surprisingly, the fifth-graders weren't the only students to feel the never-ending wrath of Sr. Mary Annina. No doubt four eighth-grade boys will never forget the time she burst into the guys' "john" only to catch them lighting up cigarettes. As punishment they had to stay after school with her every day for two weeks. Some people say she made them clean chalkboards. Others say she made them kneel on pebbles on the altar in church. Really, no one ever found out the truth, although it is said a couple of those same boys enrolled in a seminary shortly thereafter.

I managed to survive the fifth-grade and eventually make it through the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Although she'd be well over 90 now, something tells me that Sr. Mary Annina is still very much alive and managing to terrorize Catholic school children somewhere. The tyrant she was, she definitely made an impact on my life. After the fifth-grade I never fidgeted in church, kept a messy desk, smoked, or picked my nose.

Carina Atherton-Lira

My Timex™ and I . . . Just Basking in the Indiglo™

Wearing a wristwatch is a very efficient way to reduce anxiety in our daily lives. It may seem that the numbered, or otherwise demarcated, variously shaped pieces of metal that we strap or snap onto our wrists are mere decoration, just pieces of jewelry, even, but they are much, much more!

There are many reasons why we must wear watches, but they all seem to revolve around one basic human need: security. Lack of security can cause minor stress or, with additional factors, can be crippling. Probably the most common way we reduce anxiety with a watch is through using it to help us become more organized. When we have an appointment, for example, we need to be sure we get there on time. There seems to be a dreadful lack of sufficient number of clocks in the real world and this can cause a lot of anxiety, especially if the person is in a hurry. The wristwatch can fill in the gaps between the clocks. We can check a watch anytime, regardless of where we are or even whether we are moving or stationary. We can be more independent of these clocks, more self-reliant. The watch is there when the clock is not, within easy sight and always at the ready. Thanks to it, we can get to the appointment on time, judge how long we have been there, and still know how much time we have before the next one!

Wearing a wristwatch does have its merit as a fashion accessory. There have been countless fads involving watches including: Mickey Mouse™ watches, musical chiming watches, wearing the watch backwards, bracelet-style watches, calculator watches, remote-triggering watches, and other technological advances

in the watch world like Indiglo™, Talkwatch™, and multipurpose beeper watches. Now we even have phone watches! Without one of these high-style, high-tech creations on your wrist, the fashion wardrobe is just not complete, and, of course, as we all know, when one does not fit into “the Group” anxiety abounds.

The world and its reality are for us as we see them. We dwell within our own concepts. One major concept we have created, and cannot escape from, is Time. In this aspect, the conscious mind is limited; however, the subconscious is not. An excellent way to “trick” the mind into more correctly storing and filing information is to categorize it from a Time-perspective; for example, we didn’t just go to the store, we went “this morning” or at “ten o’clock this morning.” Every observer would measure this passage of Time to be different without the help of some standardized, objective measuring device. Time falls under a rule of physics that says “measurement determines reality,” i.e., if it can be measured by us, then it is real to us. So . . . that same watch that makes us so stylish also helps to keep us aware of where we are in Space-Time.

Lastly, there is the matter of “existential security.” If measurement defines reality, then Time is real. If we can measure it and have a relationship to it, then we are real, too. That relationship is easy enough to see: we are wearing it! We can feel it, touch it, see it, perhaps even hear it, and we have unlimited access to it; it makes Time ours and even seems to bring it under our control. Instead of being ruled by Time, we rule it. A famous thinker, Paul Tillich, once said, “Anxiety is the existential awareness of non-being.” Wearing a wristwatch can prove this wrong: we do exist! We are aware! We know exactly where we are in Time and we are in control!

Even in the most highly organized and strictly constructed lives there is a chance for turbulence: a tire goes flat, the toast might burn, “Murphy’s Law” may strike, but we, with our watches glimmering ever-so-softly in the sunlight, self-assured, fashion-conscious, and Time-efficient, will have the securest knowledge that all is right in the Universe and that Time does go on. . . .

Carina Atherton-Lira

A Band-Aid on My Heart

Divorce is not just the stuff of country-western songs. It is a major life change. My own divorce is a perfect example: more stress was caused by the separation, divorce, consequent loss of my daughter, and all the ever-present hearings than I could ever have imagined.

I left my then husband, James, on September 4, 1990. By the seventh of the same month, we had both filed for divorce. He found a lawyer who did cheap (but fast) photocopies of documents and I found a relatively expensive lawyer who did everything with computers and churned out wonderful, works-of-art legal papers. James won. He got his papers in first and, from that moment on, kept his lead with the court system. Herein lies one of the most profound lessons I have ever learned in this life: Looks aren't everything.

I met my husband-to-be hardly more than two years before. He had a '66 Mustang and was fixing it, looking ever so gorgeous, in front of his home. I worked and lived across the street as a housekeeper/chauffeur and had a lot of free time, so I could watch him with his car or doing yard work, or anything, really. It was that day, watching him bent over the motor of that car, that prompted me to finally walk over and say hello. He was tall and had thick, dark, run-your-fingers-through hair. He was athletic and ruggedly good-looking. My friends would later tell me he was "too good to be true." I should have listened.

I was only eighteen when I met James. I was a fierce feminist, sworn to never marry, a firm believer in the "true beauty" of humankind, and a devoted dreamer. However, I also felt that there would still be a Prince Charming to share my life with. I guess it wasn't so much to protect me and support me, but

a more nontraditional idea that he would be strong-yet-sensitive, masculine-yet-adoring, and worship me while somehow still treating me as an equal. I was naive and really had no idea of what was going on in the Real World. To me, bills were things that *other* people had, a fight was something guys had when they drank too much, and having a child was some foreign idea that really had no place in my experience.

We met. We fell in love. We agreed to marry. And thus ended my naiveté: less than a month later, lying in a heap on the kitchen floor, swollen and bleeding . . . was me.

He had a “rough” day at work. He was just too perfect to mean what he did; it was my fault. I never should have provoked him, he said. Why did I argue when I knew he was tired and cranky? Why did I make him hit me? He explained to me, in detail, why it was my responsibility to make him happy: I was to be his wife, and I needed to “learn” how to take care of him. Caressing my swollen jaw and looking at my reddened eyes and tear-stained cheeks in the bathroom mirror, all I could think was “looks aren’t everything.” I’ll heal; he’ll be okay; everything will be fine. After all, we were to be married . . . everything would be okay then. . . .

Less than two months later, we were married. We left for Michigan and Pennsylvania for our honeymoon, and I hoped that I had done the right thing. Along the way, he told me how happy he was. He told me how his dad always had said he was “no good” and would never find a woman to marry him. He told me how he loved me more than anyone before, and he told me how, if I “loved him back,” he’d love me forever.

That night, at a McDonald’s drive-up window in Sturgis, Michigan, my world exploded.

We had ordered a huge number of hamburgers, fries, nuggets, and shakes. Seeing us dressed in wedding clothes, the cashier called over the manager. This man, after congratulating us and admiring the wedding certificate that I still held in my hands, offered to give us our order free. James still tried to pay, but the manager persisted, and we left the McDonald’s with at least thirty dollars worth of food and huge smiles . . . that is, until we found our motel room and started to unpack.

Apparently, James had been doing some “thinking.” He had decided that

we didn't have to pay for the food because I "knew" the manager from somewhere, not because of any benevolence on his part. He got himself in enough of a rage that he beat at me for over an hour, left me for nearly another hour to "teach me a lesson," then came back and raped me.

The next morning, my first day of wifedom, was spent trying to put on enough makeup to cover up what had happened from my Pennsylvania family. I would never want them to think I was being beaten. With a black eye and bruises, I tried like hell to remember that "looks aren't everything."

After a year and a half of trying to appease, subdue, and make happy an unhappy man, I became pregnant. I thought it would really turn him around. I thought he would find in himself a perfect father, and again, all would be fine. I was never so overjoyed as the day I called him from the doctor's office and told him it was a "positive." He told everyone! He was so happy!

It was fantastic; for once, everything was calming down. He stopped yelling at me when I wanted to call my mother about something; he'd let a friend come over for a little while to keep the "expectant mother" company; he even volunteered his best friend to "baby-sit" me when he worked long weekends. I was glowing, I'm sure! Life just couldn't get any better...

Then I found out, at nearly four months along, that the baby was going to be a girl. We had talked about this . . . I knew that he wanted a boy, but I assumed that as long as the baby was healthy, it wouldn't matter what sex it was. Well, it did. I went, excited about the finding, to his workplace and told him the "good" news. He blew up at me, slapped me across the face, and screamed to the earth and sky (and all fifty-sixty-odd employees) that it was not *his* child.

He then went to great lengths to make sure that everyone knew all my supposed inadequacies and all his sacrifices trying to "make me a better person." Needless to say, I was heartbroken and humiliated. I thought that there was hope; now I started to plan: I needed to call the local shelter; I needed to tell my parents the truth; I needed to tell my friends that their fears were true . . . I needed to know that I was okay. I wanted to know that this wasn't all my fault. But, I stayed, not because I couldn't leave, but because my dad said not to provoke him, to watch my tongue; my mom said she didn't want to hear about it; my friends said to fight back and he'll stop; the shelter said only to call the police. . . . Nobody told me to leave. No one said that I had to leave. So, I stayed.

At five months along, I nearly miscarried. James said that I didn't make the dinner that he wanted: he wanted steak, I think, and I had made pork instead. I cramped and bled for hours from landing on the armchair sideways after being strangled nearly to the point of blacking out. A few weeks later, I awoke for the first time to a gun, affectionately named "Junior" being held against my forehead. James announced that he had the right to end my life anytime he wanted to. This was right about the time he got a job in the steel mill: instead of being gone nearly every other day "over the road," he now came home every night. As a new employee, he was the "low guy on the totem pole." Any confidence he had from his seniority at his former job flew, literally, out the window. . . . The few good days that we had had before were now forgotten; every day was a "bad day" now. He hated the mill; he hated being "new"; and he hated me most of all.

I was loving being pregnant and I was kept busy trying to love him, too. He couldn't stand it: my new habit of leaving the house to go places that were more fun to walk "for the baby" was discontinued. Now I had to start showing receipts for gas and any other money spent, and he would check the odometer every day after work.

On November 12, 1989, I gave birth at 12:30 a.m. to an incredibly beautiful baby girl, 9 pounds, 4-ounces, and 21 inches long, that I named Lysandrae Meighann. She was the antithesis to my whole life: she was quiet, pure, slept through the night from the start, always smiled, and was happy, even when she was hungry. . . she answered any questions I might have had about why I was put here on this earth. She was perfect.

James stopped coming home every night. He'd pick a fight before leaving for work, tell me he "might" be home, then stay out until sometimes four or five in the morning, knowing I'd be frantic. I became obsessed with being the perfect wife and mother: I'd have dinner on the table, according to his wishes, every night. I kept "the baby" out of his way as much as I could, and I never, ever, asked anything of him that might set him off. He calmed down, pleased with his "dominance," and loosened the hold on me for a while.

I started taking Meighann to museums, to art galleries, and to church. This was fine for a while, but I eventually started looking forward to these outings, and he got jealous.

He went back to staying out again and he resumed the odometer checks. He renewed his claims that Meighann was "not his" and, the harder he swore, the

longer he stayed gone. I started looking at pictures of us when we first met, seeing myself a lot lighter, and him looking as fit as ever, and I wondered if he was right: Was I ugly? Was I fat? Maybe looks did count for something . . .

Meighann was nine months old when we left James. I had gained nearly eighty pounds with the pregnancy, and another thirty after; I was not myself anymore. The only thing I had that seemed real was my daughter. She was as easygoing as ever, always smiling when I needed it most, and proving that not everything was terrible.

That night, she was playing with her blocks on the living room floor, quiet and oblivious to everything around her. James had come home in a rage and it deepened when he walked in and saw me feeding the baby her dinner. He stomped from room to room screaming how useless I was as a wife, and slammed a few doors to “prove” his point. I sat Meighann on the floor, gave her the block, and started to get his plate. I guess I wasn’t quick enough. He threw me against the counter, grabbed a steak knife, and held it to my throat. When he saw that I wasn’t crying yet, he held my throat and slapped me a few times. I stood there, for the first time, and stared at him.

He couldn’t handle that. He started hitting me with pots and pans, threw utensils at me, and then a glass. I eventually slid down onto the floor and hoped he would stop. . . .

He was in rare form that night. He pulled me up by my hair, which was the longest it had been in years, and held me against the refrigerator while he continued to hit me. His finale consisted of dragging me into the living room and tossing me onto the loveseat. Normally, this wouldn’t have “mattered,” but as I lost my balance and fell off, I landed on the floor, inches from my little girl, laughing and playing with her blocks, not even realizing that there was anything wrong. . . .

After more than a dozen check-in calls from the shelter, I was packed and ready to leave with Meighann. James was laughing and telling me how pathetic I was to think I could live without him. He handed me his gun, and told me that if I hated him enough to leave, I hated him enough to kill him. He told me I’d be back. He told me he’d find me and bring me back. He told me he’d kill me. He told me he’d “get” my family. He even had the nerve to tell me he loved me.

As I walked out that door, I turned, with Meighann in my arms, and realized that the “gorgeous” man I married was not “gorgeous” at all, but hideous. Not

only are “looks not everything,” they have proven to be nothing.

I now try to value the person, not what they seem to be. I stand up for myself. I can fight now for what is right; I am still fighting to get my daughter back. He did what he said he would: he pulled out all stops to get custody of her. He took advantage of my lower financial position and stopped following the court orders allowing me visitation with her. I did not see her for over two years.

I now see her every other weekend and alternate holidays.

No one has made him suffer like he did me. No one has ever told him that what he did was wrong. But . . . when my six-year-old daughter tells me she wants to come live with me because I love her, and Daddy doesn’t care, I know that someday he will have to realize what he has done.

Someday, he will be alone and there won’t be anyone else to blame anymore.

What will he see in the mirror?

I am now married to a man who is truly beautiful. I have a wonderful daughter who is truly beautiful. I have a life now that approaches one I would choose out of a catalog, if that were possible. And I would tell anyone who would listen that there is a much deeper meaning in the cliché that “looks aren’t everything.”

Arthur J. Curry

The Garden

At the age of seventeen I became a hostage to my mother's fascination with genealogy. She had spent the previous year studying her family tree and in the process had discovered a coterie of long-lost kin. This procedure resulted in the destruction of a beautiful summer weekend, which should have been spent in the pursuit of unattached girls. Instead, I was cloistered in McCormick's Creek State Park, surrounded by strangers, all wearing T-shirts declaring they were Weymouths and wanted a hug. To make matters worse, as one of the oldest "children" I was relegated to baby-sitting a horde of prepubescent brats, hell-bent on killing each other. This festivity culminated in a Saturday night where the parents sat in the dining room swapping lies, while the children were entombed in the basement.

In an effort to maintain control and some similitude of order, I agreed to read them a book. I had expected "The Cat In The Hat Gets Herpes," or something of that nature. Instead, a self-possessed moppet brought me a handsome old book, *The Secret Garden*, by Frances H. Burnett. For the next day and a half, often reading aloud to a slumberland of cherubs, I found myself mesmerized by this wonderful story about two English school children who escaped their pain and disabilities in a secret garden. Little did I know at the time that I would also find escape in a secret garden.

For reasons which are difficult to understand (let alone explain), I find myself in prison. And, contrary to anything your local politician might have told you, prison is not a pleasure dome. With the overcrowding, budgetary constraints, and inherent nature of the inhabitants, prison will never attain a AAA approval. This is why my involvement in vocational horticulture (my escape to

a secret garden) has become so valuable to me. Each day I break from the cold gray walls of my dormitory and transverse the prison to a sunlit paradise of flowers, decorative ferns, colossal house plants, and exotic foliage. Like the children in Burnett's book, I am able to discard the burdens and hardships of my life in prison when I enter class.

I always enjoyed school, but horticulture is completely different. In a garden, learning is only the first step of enrichment. As I learned the basics of horticulture—the parts of a plant, the concept of photosynthesis, and the process of identifying the many varieties of plants—my eyes were opened to all the wonder and diversity of the plant world. It ranges from the simple beauty of a Peace Lily, always in bloom, to the spectacular profusion of red blossoms that cover the Christmas Cactus—blooming and fading in a matter of days. There is the conspicuous showiness of a Zinnia in its single season of life, or the majestic charm of an Agave, which lives for one hundred years, then blooms and dies. Horticulture opens doors to hidden worlds: Orchids that grow in the tops of trees, their roots not in soil but absorbing nutrients directly from the atmosphere; Wild Bladderwort which spend their entire lives submerged in water. You struggle to save your favorite plant from a mealy bug so small it is only visible through a microscope, or worse still, your own overly enthusiastic watering. Everything you learn makes you painfully aware of how little you really know. Yet that is the value of a secret garden; you can lose yourself, your past, your mistakes, and find a new marvelous world before your very eyes.

I have found a secret garden, and like the one in Burnett's book, it is helping and healing me. I will never see the world the same way again. I know even in the darkest, most melancholy place there grows an extraordinary proliferation of plant life. Now I am learning how to nurture and sculpture that life to bring pleasure to others, so that they, too, can share in the secret garden.

Shawn O'Neil

Pyramids and Broadened Horizons

Her hair was poking out around the triangular base of the hat she made herself. This hat was constructed with three different colors of poster board: red, yellow, and blue. It was her pyramid hat. When donning this headpiece, she believed the wearer could absorb the energy that was contained within. This energy was present due to the geometrical properties of pyramids. It was necessary for her to wear this self-made garment during her morning ritual of swinging a pendulum over the mountain of vitamins she was dividing for her family. This is just one of many strange memories I have of my mother. Pyramids and pendulums were just the beginning of her lifelong quest of exploring many different horizons.

As a child in the 1970s, I thought all mothers were like mine. I assumed that all mothers fed their children organically grown food and hundreds of vitamins a week. Before going to bed, were not all children told to put their pajamas on, brush their teeth, take a tablespoon of cod liver oil and kiss their parents good night?

When I was feeling ill, I took great comfort in my mother's loving way that she would make me a special vitamin C drink and put me in a tent-sized pyramid facing due North. I was shocked to learn that my friends' mothers would drive them to the doctor. One of my least favorite chores was to grind and sift wheat, then bake enough bread for 21 meals. I was surprised to learn that my friends' mothers would buy pre-made bread at the store.

There were many things that my mother explored and accomplished during

my childhood. She could do anything to which she put her mind. She became an excellent seamstress and had a successful sewing business. She took a hiatus in Egypt to learn the Middle Eastern art of belly dancing. Finding herself unfulfilled, she then attended college and became a nurse. Eventually, she decided her heart was not in American medicine, but in Oriental medicine. She sought her second degree and became a doctor of Oriental medicine.

Reflecting on my childhood, what I once thought of as perfectly normal seems bizarre to me now. My upbringing was nontraditional, yet my mother provided many positive models that have contributed to my life. She had the courage to pursue her interests. People's opinions about her life did not discourage her from accomplishing her goals.

In the mountains of North Carolina, my mother has opened her own acupuncture clinic. She practices herbalology while giving homage to Yoga Nanda Hundia. It is unusual what my mother has chosen to do. I only associate acupuncture with pain, pyramids with Ancient Egypt, and Yoga Nanda Hundia with the occult. I have not raised a spoon of cod liver oil to my lips for 15 years, and refuse to take vitamins. I have no desire to learn belly dancing, or to sew. However, when I let my horizons broaden and look beyond the pyramids, I see the extraordinary example my mother has set.

Maureen B. Dolan

The Right to Die

“Because I could not stop for Death/ He kindly stopped for me/ The carriage held but just ourselves/And immortality” (Dickinson 194). Although some people do not care to acknowledge it, death is inevitable. In recent years, many Americans are questioning the changes which have occurred regarding this inevitable event and challenging the idea of prolonging life at any cost. They seek freedom of choice in determining the quality of their lives. They want to be freed from forced medical treatment which provides for quantity of life often at the expense of quality. As moral and ethical adults, they have the ability to determine and to choose when enough is enough, whether it be enough medical treatment, enough suffering, or enough life. They have the right to say no. All American citizens of at least majority age who have debilitating physical or mental illnesses have the right to die. Since the dawn of history, choice has traditionally been a part of the process of death.

Death has historically been a part of the normal daily routine of life. Prior to this century, most people died in their own homes, surrounded by families and friends. In some societies, helping a person to die has been considered an honorable and merciful act. For instance, aged or sick Eskimos customarily inform their families of their wish to die. The families honor this request immediately by abandoning or even killing them (Humphrey 1). Choices regarding the customs, rituals, and circumstances surrounding death have traditionally been a part of the death process. However, this traditional process has changed dramatically during this century, based on tremendous advances in medical technology.

Medical technology now provides for the treatment of many formerly fatal

diseases. It also enables the prolonging of life in cases of incurable illness. Consequently, the ill are now treated in hospitals instead of in their homes, and so the process of death has also moved from the home and family scenario into the hospital and nursing home. During this process, the dying are distanced from the daily life routine. This distancing has changed the way in which we perceive death. According to social scientist Lewis Thomas, "Many people perceive death to be shocking, dismaying, even terrifying. A dying patient is a kind of freak. It is the most unacceptable of all abnormalities, an offense against nature itself" (Bloyd 10). These changes in the perceptions and the scenarios of dying have created changes in the choices surrounding death. Many Americans are questioning these changes and their effects on the right to privacy.

The Fourth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States states that, "The right of the people to be secure in their persons . . . shall not be violated" (Constitution). In 1965, the United States Supreme Court first recognized the guarantee of privacy based on the Fourth Amendment. In a ruling regarding the case of *Griswold v Connecticut*, a case involving a dispute over birth control information and the use of contraceptives, Justice William O. Douglas ruled that:

Specific guarantees in the Bill of Rights have penumbras [meaning partial shadows] formed by emanations from those guarantees that help give them life and substance. . . . Various guarantees create zones of privacy (Humphrey 230).

The *Griswold* case first recognized the right to privacy as a fundamental Constitutional guarantee to each individual (Humphrey 230). This ruling is important because the right to privacy establishes for the first time the individual's right to choice regarding the individual's body. Few issues could be considered more private regarding the body than death. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution also has been cited in clarifying the right to die issue.

In Amendment Fourteen, the Constitution of the United States states that, "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property" (Constitution). In 1976, the Supreme Court of the State of New Jersey heard a case regarding Karen Quinlan, a comatose, young woman with irreversible brain damage. Miss Quinlan's parents requested

the discontinuation of life-prolonging medical treatment for their comatose daughter. Their request was denied by her doctors and by the hospital's administrators. The Quinlans sued to force the hospital to honor their request. Their case was based on Karen Quinlan's right to privacy, which provided for her right to die in peace. The New Jersey Court ruled in favor of the parents, stating that Miss Quinlan had the right not to have her life artificially sustained (Bloyd 32-34).

With this ruling, the Court upheld the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution, stating that "the patient's right to privacy was greater than the State's interest in the preservation and sanctity of human life" (*Atlantic Reporter* 649). The Quinlan case brought to light the principle of informed consent regarding medical treatment. This principle provides that patient consent be obtained and a full explanation given prior to any medical treatment (Bloyd 34). Informed consent provides the basis for refusal of life-prolonging treatment. The Quinlan case is important because it affirms the right to privacy recognized by Justice Douglas in the *Griswold* case. Based on the Quinlan ruling, state law may not override constitutional right, in this particular case Karen Quinlan's right to privacy. This case also sets the legal precedent for cases regarding state law and the right to privacy. Both the affirmation of the right of privacy and the legal precedent are important factors in proving the validity of the right to choice. Legal issues in the right to die controversy have plagued Doctor Jack Kevorkian, a retired Michigan pathologist and assisted-suicide practitioner.

Doctor Jack Kevorkian is an active and outspoken proponent of the right to die. His basic philosophy concerns the right of the individual not to suffer. According to Doctor Kevorkian, "This is the very essence of human autonomy, something that goes way beyond a so-called right, and I am honored as a healer to help any suffering patient whose condition medically warrants it" (Dority 6). Doctor Kevorkian has assisted in many suicides. In March and in May of 1996, he was tried and acquitted by a Michigan Court on charges of assisting with a suicide. These suicides were requested by the people involved as the only way in which to relieve their intolerable suffering (Dority 6). These acquittals support the individual right of choice in both declining medical treatment and choosing to die. They point out that, based on the Fourteenth Amendment, state law cannot override the constitutionally provided right to privacy. A turning point

in the right to privacy struggle was the case of *Roe v Wade*.

Roe v Wade, a 1973 United States Supreme Court case, was brought by a young woman who wished to terminate her pregnancy. Her request was denied by the State of Texas, based on a Texas law prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother. The woman's life was not in danger. The United States Supreme Court ruled that the Texas law was unconstitutional and violated this woman's right to privacy (United States 113). This legal victory for abortion rights has been cited in more than thirty termination of treatment cases in upholding the right to privacy. Derek Humphrey, a longtime right to die advocate, states that "*Roe v Wade* was the turning point in the momentum of the euthanasia movement. The court relies heavily on *Roe v Wade* in assisted suicide cases" (Bernardi 6). The *Roe v Wade* ruling provides a clear backup to the 1956 right to privacy ruling of Justice William O. Douglas in the *Griswold v Connecticut* case. It is a pivotal point in the right to die controversy.

The Fourth Amendment to the Constitution sets forth the right of citizens to be secure in their persons. The Supreme Court rulings in the *Griswold* and *Roe v Wade* cases along with State Court rulings in the *Quinlan* and *Kevorkian* cases have shown this right to extend to the rights of privacy and of choice. Based on these rights, all American citizens of majority age who have a debilitating physical or mental illness have the right to choose the terms of their deaths. They have the right to reject life-prolonging treatment and suffering. They have the right to choose to die.

Since the dawn of history, people have made choices regarding death and the surrounding circumstances and rituals. These choices have traditionally been made in the privacy of the home with the help of families and friends. Lifesaving medical technology has changed the nature of illness and of death. Hospitals and nursing homes now provide the care that the family once provided. The process of death has been distanced from the safe haven of families and friends. This process is often encompassed by a frightening and unwanted entanglement of tubes and machines which do no more than prolong the inevitable. At this point, death is no longer a natural process but instead a victimization by lifesaving technology.

Are Americans so focused on the more is better philosophy that they condone or even promote the victimization of their most defenseless citizens? Have

they lost the ability to know when enough is enough? Are they so distanced from or afraid of death that they are willing to give up their own rights in that inevitable moment? The Constitution of the United States provides for the rights of the weak and defenseless as well as the strong. Doctor Kevorkian states it this way, "Every reasonable adult is going to have to realize that if he votes no on this, he is throwing his right away" (Bernardi 6). The right of Americans is to choose in that inevitable moment when death comes calling, that moment when more is not better, when suffering is not merciful, when enough is enough. "Because I could not stop for Death/ He kindly stopped for me (Dickinson 194)

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Maureen B. Dola

Refugees Within the Refuge: Disabilities and Homelessness

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.*

These words, written by poet Emma Lazarus, are inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, the door to the United States of America, the shining, golden door opened in refuge to refugees who have fled their native lands in search of a better way of life. Unfortunately, America, the golden door society, has developed one of the same problems which plagued many of those refugees. That problem is homelessness, a circumstance which most Americans believe could never happen to them. James Rodney (J.R.) Richard, a Houston Astros' pitcher who earned \$850,000 per year was one of those Americans. However, he learned differently. Richard suffered a major stroke in 1980. Following two surgeries, extensive physical therapy, and several attempts to return to pitching, Richard was finally permanently released from the Astros. His downward spiral continued with a series of financial misfortunes. He was also divorced. Richard ultimately lost his home and ended up sleeping under a freeway overpass in Houston, Texas. J.R. Richard, the most dominating pitcher in the major leagues in 1980, as well as the player who was strongly favored to

win the National League Cy Young Award, was now homeless (Reisgies 16).

President Clinton's 1993 "Report on Homelessness" defines a homeless person as an individual who lacks a regular, fixed, and adequate nighttime residence; who has a primary nighttime residence that is a shelter, or an institution for temporary living, or is a public or private place not designed, or regularly used, for sleeping accommodations for human beings; and who is not imprisoned or detained by law. Research has shown that about 7,000,000 Americans were homeless at some point in the late 1980s, and as many as 600,000 were homeless on a given night (United States 22). The Salvation Army of Austin, Texas, reported having served 100 percent more homeless people in 1985 than it had in 1979 (Snow 233). Some factors contributing to this increase were changes in the economic structure, cuts in welfare programs, cuts in the supply of low income housing, increasing costs of low income housing, deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, and cuts in subsidies for the disabled (Gelles 266-68). Disabilities and pathologies create a vulnerability to homelessness. Based on the natures of their conditions, many of the disabled are not able to successfully function in the worlds of work, of housing, and in the welfare system. Often the problems of the disabled wear out their support systems of families and friends. The number of people with disabilities and pathologies, who became homeless during this period of time, made a significant contribution to the surge in homelessness seen during the 1980s. These conditions continue to affect the problem of homelessness, an expensive and persistent condition which we cannot afford to ignore. It is morally unacceptable, in a society with the ability to do the right thing, to fail to provide care for these disabled and suffering people. Many societies have had problems with insufficient housing and with homelessness.

In the United States, the homeless have historically been housed in orphanages, poorhouses, hospitals, and institutions. The United States government first became involved in the homelessness problem in 1932 with the inception of post-depression programs for the construction of housing. The Housing Act of 1949 had as its goal decent housing and suitable living environments for every American, an unmet goal. President Clinton's "Federal Plan of 1993 to Break the Cycle of Homelessness" had the same goal (United States 3). In 1965, the Department of Housing and Urban Development was created with

the goal of addressing Federal problems relating to housing and urban problems. This toothless tiger was given the task, among other duties, of encouraging the spending of state, local and private funds to create housing. It was not, however, given the power to enforce that spending (Housing 496). Obviously, these efforts have not been successful in addressing housing needs, as shown by the numbers of homeless people visible on the streets throughout the country. Some homeless people have mental problems which create and perpetuate a vicious cycle of problems for them and for society.

Mental problems have played significant contributory roles in the increase in homelessness since the 1980s. According to a survey of the homeless, 27 percent reported actually having one or more disabilities, while over 15 percent noted that a disability was the causative factor of their homelessness (Snow 255). The differences in these reported percentages may be accounted for by the pathologies of mental problems. Some people, especially those with severe mental illnesses, are unable to evaluate the causes of their homelessness. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, up to one-third of the homeless have severe mental illnesses (United States 24). Many of these mentally ill people had been treated and cared for in hospitals or in mental institutions, until deinstitutionalization was implemented.

Deinstitutionalization, the process of moving mentally ill people from institutions into outpatient care, began in the mid 1950s, and continued through mid 1970s. This movement was based on new insights in two areas of mental health which were brought to light in the 1950s. These two insights were newly developed antipsychotic drugs to be used in the treatment of severe mental illnesses, and the new belief that malevolent environments, in this case mental hospitals, were basic and sustaining factors in mental illnesses. These insights did not prove to provide the hoped for panacea in mental health treatment. Hospitals were emptied, but sufficient numbers of outpatient treatment centers for the released patients did not materialize. Frequently, centers which were created were devoted to treating less disturbed people with outpatient therapy. The new drugs often were not taken at all by the now unmonitored patients. If the drugs were taken, serious side effects often followed, or the drugs were ineffective. Follow up for both drug therapy and the outpatient treatments failed. (Kraljic 85-86). The results of this experiment were that tens of thousands of mentally ill people

were dumped out onto the streets, helpless and without refuge. Sometimes they were dangerous to themselves and to others. Their family support systems, if any had existed, often were worn out, simply by the exhausting manifestations of mental problems. By the mid 1980s, these released patients made a significant numerical contribution to the growing numbers of the homeless (Snow 234-36). Treating the mentally ill in this way is morally unacceptable, and is unconscionable in a society which has the ability to care for all of its members compassionately. This problem still exists, and creates a vicious cycle of homelessness that will not stop without intervention. This vicious cycle is also perpetuated by the extremely high rates of mental problems in specific segments of the population.

One particularly important segment of this population is the family, particularly the single parent family. Until 1982, families had not been among the homeless in significant numbers since the Great Depression. Studies have shown that one particular characteristic of homeless families is the high incidence of mental health problems experienced by the parents, mostly single mothers, and by their extended family members. This factor plus several others, including cuts in welfare and housing programs during the 1980s, forced many families to fall over the precarious edge from home to homelessness. Mental health problems helped push these families out into the streets, where they were forced to find sleeping quarters in parks, abandoned buildings, cars, and shelters (Zima 2). These families contributed significantly to the surge in homelessness during the 1980s. The ramifications of this go much further than just the initial numbers.

According to a 1996 study, families now make up nearly 37 percent of the homeless. The majority of these families are still headed by single mothers. Furthermore, 72 percent of these mothers reported having been diagnosed with mental health problems during their lifetimes, with major depressive disorders, post traumatic stress disorders, and suicide attempts occurring frequently. They had also experienced larger than average numbers of stressful interpersonal events in their lives. These stressful events were often related to the drug or mental health problems of extended family members. Many of these women had been abused. As a not very surprising consequence of these problems, these families were also much more likely to have children who exhibited men-

tal health or behavioral problems (Zima 2). The seriousness of these generationally transmitted problems cannot be lightly dismissed. They show very clearly the cyclic nature of problems that contribute to homelessness. Without intervention, this phenomenon will continue, and will be costly in many ways. The perpetuation of homelessness is a costly matter, not only in dollar costs, but also in the loss of human potential. It is unconscionable for a society of abundance and ability to victimize these vulnerable people. Other costly problem which have contributed to homelessness are the disabling conditions of substance abuse and addiction.

Substance abuse and addiction problems, in conjunction with extreme poverty, have been linked since Victorian times with the precipitation of homelessness (Wolch 241). Research studies throughout the 1980s consistently found that at least one-half of the homeless population had current or past substance problems. (United States 24). This segment of the population had been in existence for many years, but prior to the 1980s it had been much less visible. These people were now seen sleeping in doorways, under bridges, in cardboard boxes, in parks, and in abandoned buildings throughout the country. Several changes occurred during the 1980s which made addiction an in-your-face reality which could no longer be ignored.

One of these changes was the decline in the number of single room occupancy units which had formerly housed many now outcast addicts. It affected particularly those chronic addicts and alcoholics who lived in skid row areas which specialized in these single room rentals. The decline of this housing was precipitated by government cutbacks in funding, and also by the razing of existing inner-city housing in favor of other types of development. Another change involved the decriminalization, in most states, of public drunkenness. An arrest for public drunkenness had often meant a night in jail and a roof overhead for the night. Both of these changes eliminated sleeping accommodations. These newly homeless outcasts were now a reality for the rest of society. Existent alcohol and drug treatment programs were inadequate and overburdened, and were unable to provide sufficient aid and shelter to these chronic substance abusers (Kraljic 95-96).

Chronic alcoholics are the hard-core, deteriorated alcoholics who have become homeless through their mobility, their disaffiliation with support systems,

and their alcoholism. They often come from working-class backgrounds, have low educational levels, and have inadequate employment skills (Barak 29). One homeless man, a resident of a treatment center, said "I used to work steadily as a mechanic and had a wife and a son until 15 years ago when my drinking got out of control . . . I left my wife and son and hit the streets." He had been on and off of the streets for that fifteen years. A self-proclaimed bum said that "Alcohol is the secret. . . . I can get off the streets but I can't stay off them. This damn bottle licks me every time." He had been on the streets for three years (Snow 55). Treatment for addicts, if any, often consists of three to four days of detoxification, often with no aftercare. Relapse is the norm. Many homeless addicts go through detoxification dozens of times, sometimes just to have a place to stay for awhile. One 39-year-old alcoholic stated that he had been through the detoxification process 480 times (United States 97,98). Short-term detoxification treatment appears to be only a stopgap measure, which provides shelter for a short time. It makes no real impact on the addiction problem. By the end of the 1980s, Federal cutbacks in funding had decreased the money available for drug programs by 36 percent, with the remaining funds being allocated in larger proportion to enforcement of drug statutes than to treatment programs (Wolch 134). The pathology of addictions, the funding cutbacks, and the inadequacies in the existing treatment programs contributed significantly to the increase in homelessness during the 1980s. The costs in terms of the loss of human potential, as well as the dollar costs of after-the-fact solutions have been tremendous. They will continue to mount until we have both effective preventive and long-term treatment programs for addicts. We will continue to have people sleeping in the streets, an unacceptable condition in a society that has the ability to alleviate this problem. Another factor that contributed to the increase in homelessness during the 1980s. was the advent of crack cocaine.

Crack cocaine was a new and much cheaper form of cocaine which produced a shorter high than other forms of cocaine. In the mid 1980s, a hit of crack cost about ten dollars. Crack is now available for three to five dollars a hit. Crack was affordable to those who used get high from a half-pint of hard liquor or a six-pack of beer. Its burgeoning use attested to the fact that many people were using it as their drug of choice, or in conjunction with other drugs, or with alcohol. Based on studies done in New York City, the so-called crack

capital of the world, reasonable estimates, projected nationwide, indicated that one-third of all homeless adults used crack regularly. Studies also indicate that the rate of substance abuse is higher today than it was in the 1980s (Jencks 41-48). The addition of this cheap, new drug to the scene in the 1980s increased the already existent ranks of alcohol and drug users by a whole new segment. Crack also contributed a new source of a readily available, cheap drug for the existent alcohol and drug abusers. Heavy drug use causes homelessness by making people less employable, or not employable at all, and therefore unable to provide for themselves. It alienates existing support systems because of the objectionable, drug-related behavior. It also uses up money that could be used for housing. This phenomenon contributed significantly to the increase in the homeless population during the 1980s. It also perpetuated and increased the already significant costs related to addiction and homelessness. Other conditions which contributed to the increase in homelessness during the 1980s were chronic physical health problems and disabilities.

Since the 1700s, large numbers of the homeless have been American Veterans. By the nature of military service during war, these veterans are likely to have disabilities and other chronic health problems. Although we generally think that military service carries with it respect, history tells another story. Following the Revolutionary War, demonstrations by homeless veterans were quelled by troops. In one shocking instance, George Washington sent 600 troops against 200 veterans to set what he called an example. After the Civil War, veterans, many of whom were disabled by their injuries, were left to their own means to return to their homes. Some were homeless for years. Following World War I, 20,000 homeless and destitute veterans gathered outside Washington, D.C. to demand the federal assistance which they had been promised. General MacArthur led troops against them to quell their demands (VanderStaay 99-101). This historic, disrespectful treatment of veterans resurfaced in the 1980s.

During the 1980s, federal assistance benefits, which had provided necessary support for disabled veterans as well as for other physically and mentally disabled people, were abruptly cut off in large proportion. As a result, many people were forced into the streets with no means of support. Gypsy Bill was one of those people. He had received Supplemental Security Income for many years, until he was abruptly cut from the roles and became homeless. Although

his benefits were reinstated after three years and three lengthy administrative appeals, most of the disabled were not so fortunate. Residency requirements for many Federal programs, in conjunction with the long processes of applications and appeals, make the likelihood of success in obtaining aid almost nonexistent for ill or disabled people. It is nearly impossible for those who are already homeless (Snow 140-41) The results of ten national homeless studies, completed in 1985, showed an average of 33 percent of the homeless too disabled to work. The large numbers of disabled, homeless people point out the significant impact of chronic health problems and physical disabilities on the increase in homelessness during the 1980s. These circumstances are continuing today, based on the resurgence of tuberculosis and the HIV and AIDS epidemics. In large cities, an estimated 25 to 40 percent of people with active tuberculosis are either homeless, or are in immediate danger of becoming homeless, because of their illnesses. Homelessness of the ill and disabled will continue to be a growing and costly problem for society. These costs will fall to the taxpayers through the costs of after-the-fact treatments. These treatments are certainly more costly and less effective, by far, than preventive and regular, ongoing health care treatments. Housing is critical for these people (Rossi 158-60).

Disabilities and pathologies create a vulnerability to homelessness. They played a significant part in the surge of homelessness during the 1980s, and they continue to affect the problem of homelessness today. Mental problems created the same vulnerability in many people. Many were then victimized by deinstitutionalization and ended up homeless. Many families with children became homeless as a result of vulnerabilities created by mental health problems. The children from these families developed more mental health and behavioral problems than the average, thus continuing the cycle of vulnerability which perpetuates homelessness. Alcohol and drug abuse, particularly the advent of crack cocaine, created vulnerabilities which led many people to homelessness. Physically disabled and chronically ill people, many of them veterans, became homeless as the result of Federal assistance benefits cuts, thereby increasing the homeless population even more. Tuberculosis, along with the HIV and AIDS epidemics, continue to perpetuate the problem today. Homeless people are suffering greatly every day, and all of society is suffering from the effects of their homelessness.

Treating people in such an uncaring manner is morally unacceptable in a society which has the ability to do the right thing. Homelessness is a problem which will not disappear just because people ignore it. People often ignore what they fear and, based on the experience of James Rodney Richard, homelessness could happen to almost anyone, given the right circumstances. The costs of homelessness are great. Huge amounts of money are spent on after-the-fact measures, which do little to alleviate the problem or prevent future problems. The loss of human potential, especially the potential of the children, is a tremendous loss for the future of the United States. Perhaps the greatest loss of all is the loss of focus concerning what the United States of America is supposed to be all about. Has the land of the free and the home of the brave, the golden door society of refuge, become the land of the selfish and uncaring? Homelessness will surely continue and will grow until the contributing and perpetuating problems are resolved. Americans would be wise to pay immediate attention to this problem, or like J.R. Richard, they, too, may find themselves out in the cold some day.

James Rodney Richard was one of the more fortunate of the disabled homeless. Floyd Lewis, a minister from Houston, took Richard under his wing and helped him to get back onto his feet and into an apartment (Reisgies 1). The majority of the homeless, however, do not fare so well. They do not find a caring society full of kind benefactors, or a government willing to provide adequate programs to assist them in finding places of shelter and safety. They are not as fortunate as J.R. Richard was. They have now become the huddled masses, the wretched refuse, the tempest tossed, the homeless, yearning to breathe free, except for one major difference. The homeless are not foreigners, but are refugees within the refuge. They live within the land of the golden door, which for them is quickly losing its glimmer, the glimmer of hope. That glimmer of hope can only be restored by the caring and kindness of their fellow citizens.

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Donna Hale

Homozygous and Maternal Phenylketonuria

From the precise moment of conception begins the formation of a new human being, a phenomenon which takes approximately 266 days. Each step along the way, from the pre-embryonic stage, to the embryonic stage, through the end of the fetal stage when the baby is ready for birth, involves a multitude of intricate and complex processes. So numerous and complicated are these processes, with so many opportunities for mistakes to occur, that it is amazing how many babies are born free of birth defects. Not so fortunate are approximately 3 percent of all newborns who have an abnormality present at birth (Beckman 651).

Congenital Abnormalities Defined

These abnormalities may be referred to in various ways such as birth defects, congenital disorders, congenital malformations, inborn disorders, etc. However, they all mean the same thing. The Birth Defects Encyclopedia gives the following definition for congenital anomalies: Physical abnormalities of prenatal origin that interfere with the child's normal development (Buyse 1990). The cause of congenital disorders in children can be related to environmental factors such as maternal disease, drugs, or radiation. These factors account for approximately 20 percent of all birth defects. The remaining 80 percent of birth defects are genetically inherited (Porth 44). These disorders can result from abnormalities in a single gene or in the combination of two or more genes.

Mendel's Units of Inheritance

Genes are the units of inheritance. The researcher who made the largest

contribution to the study of genes is Gregor Mendel. From 1857 to 1865, Mendel used pea plants to study the elements of heredity (Lewis 270). He discovered that the offspring of all pea plants consistently acquired the same ratio of traits. From this, he became aware that there was something that was being passed from the parent plants to their offspring that determined their traits—what we know today as genes. The transmission of genes in humans works the same as in peas.

Single Gene Abnormalities

Mendelian traits is the name given to congenital disorders in humans that result from a single gene abnormality, and there are approximately 2,500 known types of such single-gene disorders and an additional 2,500 suspected ones (Lewis 276). Approximately 1 percent of all hospitalized adults and 5 percent of all hospitalized children, collectively, are being treated for such a disorder (Porth 44). An abnormality in a single gene or a pair of genes is the cause of many inherited diseases. In these cases, the chromosomes, which are threadlike structures that house the genes, are completely normal. The defect is at the gene level. The Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics notes that, “each single mutant gene exhibits one of the four patterns of Mendelian inheritance: autosomal recessive, autosomal dominant, X-linked recessive, or X-linked dominant” (Behrman 270).

All single-gene or Mendelian traits are determined by two genes that function as a pair, one from the mother and one from the father (Olds 131). The X-linked or sex-linked disorders are those for which the abnormal gene is carried on the X chromosome and are predominantly recessive. X-linked dominant disorders are extremely rare.

Autosomes are the non-sex chromosomes that appear in homologous pairs in the somatic cell. The autosomes in each pair are identical in size, shape and in gene loci. When the abnormal gene overshadows the normal gene of a pair, causing the manifestation of a disorder, the affected individual is said to have an autosomal dominantly inherited disorder. In affected families, the risk of acquiring an autosomal dominant disorder is greater than that of acquiring an autosomal recessive disorder which will be discussed next. This is because in autosomal dominant inheritance, the disease or disorder manifests itself when an individual has a single abnormal gene (Hodgson 719). However, in autosomal recessive modes of inheritance, the normal gene is the dominant one. For

an individual to exhibit a disorder resulting from autosomal recessive inheritance, he or she must have two abnormal genes. One of the abnormal genes comes from the father and the other from the mother making the offspring homozygous for the disorder. In contrast to autosomal dominant disorders where any presence of the abnormal gene results in manifestation of the disorder, in autosomal recessive disorders an individual can have one abnormal gene and not have the disease. This is because the abnormal gene is recessive and, therefore, is overshadowed by the normal dominant gene. In this case, the person carrying a single abnormal gene is a carrier of the disorder.

Phenylketonuria - an Autosomal Recessive Disorder

This background information leads to the discussion of Phenylketonuria (PKU), which is an example of the transmission of a disorder through autosomal recessive inheritance. The following map labels the normal gene "P" and the abnormal gene "p." Following fertilization, the embryo will have two genes that could carry the PKU disorder. One gene is passed on from the father and one from the mother. The following combinations are possible: pp, pP, Pp, PP. Because this is an autosomal recessive condition, a child has to receive two defective or "p" genes to have the disorder. Therefore, "pp" represents a child with PKU. "pP" or "Pp" would be a carrier of the disorder without actually having it, and "PP" would be both free of the disorder and a noncarrier. PKU is passed from one generation to the next by the carriers of the defective gene. The chromosome in which the abnormal gene responsible for PKU is located has been identified by scientists as 12q (Behrman 271).

Inheritance of PKU

A. On average, when two carriers mate, the results are 25 percent normal children, 50 percent carriers, and 25 percent affected children giving a genotypic ratio of 1:2:1. B. The offspring of a carrier and a noncarrier mate results in, on average, 50 percent normal children and 50 percent carriers. None are affected.

PKU and other autosomal recessive disorders are not gender specific, but can affect male or female alike. In contrast to autosomal dominant disorders which affect every generation, PKU can skip generations due to the fact that symptoms are not manifested in carriers. For children to inherit PKU they must be homozygous recessive, meaning both of the parents are carriers and have each passed on an abnormal gene to the child.

Discovery of PKU

PKU was first discovered by a Norwegian biochemist / physician in 1934. He was approached by a relative who was concerned because of an odd smell coming from the diapers of her two severely mentally retarded infants. The chemist performed some tests and determined that when ferric chloride was added to the urine of the two infants, there was a substance in their urine that would turn purple (Wolkomier 162). This substance was later identified as phenylpyruvic acid. In the mid-1950s, it was revealed that PKU is caused by a deficiency of the enzyme phenylalanine hydroxylase. This deficiency, itself, was a sign of a defect in the Phenylalanine hydroxylase gene.

Pathophysiology of PKU

Phenylalanine is an essential amino acid required for the normal growth and development of infants and children and, for normal metabolism of protein throughout life. Normally, any excess phenylalanine in the body is converted to another amino acid: tyrosine. However, because infants and children with PKU have a deficiency of phenylalanine hydroxylase, the converting agent, dangerous levels of phenylalanine accumulate in the blood and other body fluids. This excess phenylalanine produces the abnormal metabolite, phenylpyruvic acid. This byproduct is then eliminated in the urine and sweat, giving off an unusual musty smell like the odor noticed by the mother of the two afflicted infants. In addition to the innate deficiency of tyrosine, the metabolism of amino acid and protein may be affected by the accumulation of phenylalanine and may, subsequently, hinder the selective transport of other amino acids across cell membranes. For example, in the kidney, the tubular transport system faces a load of phenylalanine which approaches its maximum transport capacity, and in the brain the amino acid inhibits the transport of tyrosine, 5-hydroxytryptophan, and other amino acids, leading to serious distortions of amino acid patterns in the cerebrospinal fluid and brain (Freeman 60).

The toxic accumulation of phenylalanine is one known factor that causes severe mental retardation and disruption of normal metabolism in infants with PKU. However, other possible contributory factors could include the effect of amino acid imbalance on protein synthesis, interference with myelination and deficient production of serotonin, epinephrine, and norepinephrine (Freeman 69).

Clinical Manifestations

PKU occurs in approximately one in 12,000 live births worldwide (Olds 990). However, the newborn with PKU initially has no symptoms of the disorder. This is because before birth, most of the excessive phenylalanine from the fetus travels across the placental membrane, where it is metabolized by the mother's normal enzyme. However, usually around the fourth month of the infant's life symptoms become observable.

Some of the early symptoms of PKU are severe vomiting, an eczema-like skin rash and the unpleasant odor of the urine and sweat of the infant. If the young infant is left untreated, usually by the age of six months, signs of mental retardation start to appear due to degeneration of the brain and defective myelination of the nerves (Mott 1548). If treatment is not initiated, it is possible for the affected infant to lose about 50 points in IQ by the end of the first year of life (Behrman 307). The mental retardation is often accompanied with hyperactivity, rhythmic rocking, autism and seizures. There are often jerky, involuntary movements of the extremities of children afflicted with PKU as seen in some forms of cerebral palsy. Additional findings in older untreated children are microcephaly, prominent maxilla with widely spaced teeth, enamel hypoplasia, and growth retardation (Behrman 307).

Upon examination, physicians have noted that most of the children with PKU have much lighter hair, eyes and skin than their unaffected siblings. The reason for this decrease in pigmentation is that these children are unable to convert phenylalanine to tyrosine. Tyrosine is the enzyme that produces pigment melanin giving the skin, eyes and hair their color. More than 50 percent of the affected children have abnormal electro-encephalographic (EEG) patterns (Behrman 307).

Diagnosing PKU

In 1959, Dr. Robert Guthrie developed the first newborn screening test (Guthrie 1963). Since that time, newborn screening has been the most important tool available for identifying such inborn errors as PKU. Fortunately, in most states, infants are routinely tested for PKU, once before leaving the hospital and again at two weeks of age. The test involves obtaining a small amount of blood from the child's heel and placing it in a medium with a strain of *Bacillus subtilis*, a bacterium that grows only in the presence of phenylalanine (Mosby 539). If the bacteria reproduces, the test is positive and is often followed up by additional tests to check the

levels of phenylalanine and tyrosine concentrations of the plasma. Some physicians request a diaper test in which a prepared test stick is pressed against the wet area of the diaper and the color change is observed. A green color is evidence of the probability of PKU. The criteria for diagnosis of PKU is: (1) a plasma phenylalanine level above 20 mg/dl (1.2 mM); (2) a normal plasma tyrosine level; (3) increased urinary levels of metabolites of phenylalanine (phenylpyruvic and o-hydroxyphenylacetic acids); and (4) a normal concentration of the cofactor tetrahydrobiopterin (Behrman 307).

Treatment

If PKU is diagnosed early, the treatment is straightforward. It is amazing that such a terrible disorder can be averted so simply. The goal of treatment in the young infant is to reduce phenylalanine and its metabolites in body fluids in order to prevent or minimize brain damage. Mental retardation can be prevented in infants with PKU by initializing a phenylalanine restrictive diet. The infant with PKU is given a special formula which contains minimal amounts of phenylalanine, but includes the normal amounts of the other essential amino acids. Lofenalac is a formula commonly prescribed for infants with PKU (Olds 993). The growing child can eat small quantities of high protein foods that contain phenylalanine such as meats, cheeses, and poultry. However, close supervision of nutritional intake is imperative. It is also necessary to check the concentration of phenylalanine in the blood at frequent intervals. The "good control" range for the blood phenylalanine level is between 2-10 mg/dL (Mott 1550).

This restrictive diet becomes more and more difficult to maintain as the child gets older. When a child reaches the age of 5 or 6, he or she becomes more aware of other tempting foods and, begins to encounter peer pressure to eat the great tasting foods that "everyone else" is eating. It was previously thought safe to discontinue the low phenylalanine diet at the age of 6 when most brain growth is complete. However, because myelination continues actively through adolescence and to some extent possibly through 40 years of age, most physicians now agree that the low phenylalanine diet should be continued indefinitely. Recent studies showing loss of intellectual function some years after relaxation of dietary restriction support the need for life long adherence to a low phenylalanine diet (Olds 993). However, the diet need not be as rigid after the age of 7 or 8 once brain growth is complete, as long as phenylalanine levels are monitored frequently and kept below 15 mg/dl (Olds 993).

Side Effects of Treatment

Discovery of newborn screening procedures in 1959 and the subsequent dietary treatment have saved many children from a life long sentence of severe mental retardation and many years in an institution. The treatment allowed PKU patients to have a far more normal life than the earlier victims. However, the success of the newborn screening program initiated in the early 1960s gave birth to a significant and unanticipated problem. Previously, women with PKU did not have children because of the severity of their condition, but due to the diagnosis and successful treatment during early infancy, thousands of young women of low-normal to normal intelligence are now bearing children. Many have not been on the restrictive diet for several years and again have elevated serum phenylalanine levels (Hall 118). Statistics show that offspring of untreated maternal PKU pregnancies are at a 92 percent risk for mental retardation, a 73 percent risk for microcephaly, a 12 percent risk for congenital heart disease, and a 40 percent risk for low birth weight (Waisbren 1636). These women produce children with such symptoms, not because the children have PKU but because high maternal phenylalanine levels are toxic to the developing fetus (Hanley 152).

Minimizing the Risks in Offspring of PKU Women

To minimize risks in the offspring of women with PKU, metabolic control is necessary during pregnancy and, furthermore, to be most effective, must begin prior to conception. For most prospective mothers with PKU, this means going back on a low phenylalanine diet. The recommended diet is highly restrictive, allowing only measured amounts of fruits, vegetables, and grains and supplementing the diet with tyrosine and trace elements when necessary (American 391). The mothers serum phenylalanine levels should be kept below 10 mg/dl throughout the pregnancy and, preferably, in the 2-6 mg/dl range (Waisbren 1639). Current data suggest that the severity of effects on the fetus parallels increasing maternal serum phenylalanine levels (Hall 119). One report in Nutrition Reviews reveals the preliminary results of a study still in progress which is observing 318 pregnant women with PKU. Initial data support the conclusion that the best chance for a positive pregnancy outcome in women with PKU results from initiation of a phenylalanine restricted diet before conception and strict control of maternal blood phenylalanine levels throughout pregnancy. Minimal risk to the unborn fetus occurs when dietary restriction is implemented

before pregnancy; however, the study reveals that there is still benefit to children born to mothers who initiate treatment in the early weeks of pregnancy. No benefit is apparent when control is delayed after 20 weeks gestation (American 392). The best known way to eliminate intellectual impairment in the offspring of women with PKU who are affected by the high levels of maternal phenylalanine, and the homozygous infant who inherits the abnormal genes responsible for PKU, is life long adherence to a low phenylalanine diet with frequent monitoring of serum phenylalanine levels.

What the Future May Hold

Recent advancements in genetic technology may be opening the door to future alternative treatments for PKU. The Human Genome Project has recently been initiated and involves the cooperation of many nations attempting to discover the sequences and functions of all human genes (Lewis 381). With this collaboration, geneticists are constantly discovering new genes. With the ability to link each new gene to a specific set of symptoms, scientists are learning how to attack and treat health problems with more precision. Fortunately for individuals with PKU, one of the goals of the Human Genome Project is to develop new diagnostic tests and, eventually, treatments for Mendelian disorders (Lewis 382).

For PKU patients, this may mean treatment with gene therapy in which the causative genes would be replaced by normal genes hence promoting the production of phenylalanine hydroxylase and, therefore, eliminating the accumulation of phenylalanine in the blood and other body fluids. This would be a giant step forward in genetic technology and would not be achieved without overcoming many obstacles and limitations. However, if these phenomenal technological advancements continue at the current rate, soon children inheriting this disorder from their carrier parents may be exempted from a life sentence of abnormalities associated with PKU, and from the oppressing low phenylalanine diet currently imposed on victims of this disorder. Additionally, if new, nonaffected genes could replace the abnormal genes in infants with PKU, the threat of these female children later "poisoning" their offspring with high phenylalanine levels would be virtually eliminated. As genetic researchers strive to find better, essentially risk free treatments for Mendelian disorders, individuals with PKU should closely follow the prescribed low protein diet and frequently monitor their phenylalanine levels, remembering that each day technology is one step closer to helping them and their children and grandchildren.

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Nancy Howell

Contributors

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Robert Cox is a junior who loves literature. He hopes to pass this love along to a younger generation as a high school English teacher. He believes a teacher armed with knowledge, excitement, and patience can break through to this scary group. If not, then a bullwhip will suffice.

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Maureen B. Dolan is a senior working toward her Bachelor of Liberal Studies degree, with a primary focus in the behavioral sciences. In May 1996, she earned an associate degree in general business, with an accounting major. She hopes to pursue a master’s degree in social work.

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